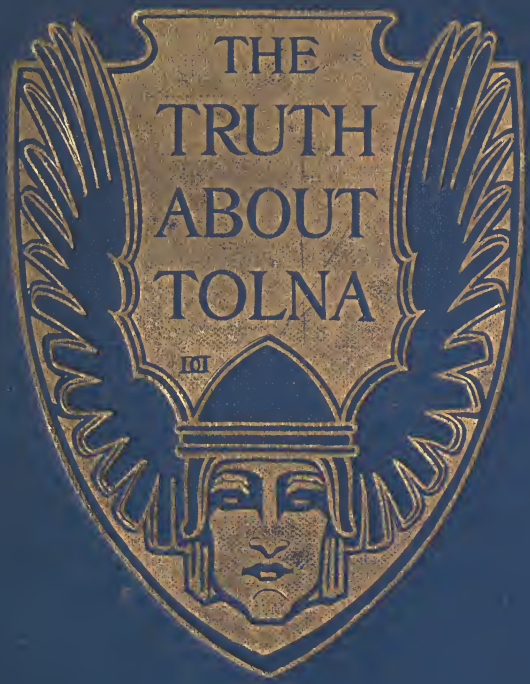

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The Truth About Tolna

"The singer bowed again without speaking, the melancholy of his face unaltered."

The Truth About Tolna

By
Bertha Runkle
Author of "The Helmet of Navarre," etc.

New York
The Century Co.
1906

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Published February 1906

THE DEVINNE PRESS

TO

L. H. B.

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THE TRUTH ABOUT TOLNA

THE TRUTH ABOUT TOLNA

CHAPTER I

"LOHENGRIN"

THE wedding-march safely established *Elsa* and her bridegroom in the center of the stage. Denys Alden, watching from the wing as anxiously as if he had made the match, allowed his furrowed brow to smooth. Still half afraid to release the singers from his hypnotic eye, he yet turned toward the vast auditorium.

Even in its semi-darkness the glitter of jewels traced the two great horseshoes of boxes, while, as the listeners in the orchestra chairs stirred with the sweep and passion of the music, jewels flashed out and paled again, like an army of fireflies. Not a seat in the house was empty. Not an auditor but listened as if never before had the meaning of music been made manifest.

Denys drew the deep breath of satisfaction, frowning ferociously the while as his keen gaze failed to discover, in the cavernous twilight, the happy spot where She was sitting. For he knew that until She shared his triumph it was not really his, and the footlights stretched before him like a flaming sword, beyond which he might not even look. Defiantly he turned his back on the stage; then resolutely stopped, caught and held by the habit of years; then trampled the habit of years under his hurrying feet.

A lightly built, firm-knitted, slender creature, graceful, restless, quick of movement, eager of speech, his blue eyes burning vividly under the shadow of long black hair, he burst into the Burnham box with the suddenness of a stage imp shot from a trap. Mr. Burnham, taking his comfortable habitual nap in a back corner, habitually left the duties of hospitality to that alert young woman, Mrs. Burnham, who greeted the visitor with a flash of eyes and teeth and diamonds; the rest, silence. So long as it was fashionable to talk during the music, Mrs. Nortie's ready tongue was never still. But when good form said, "Mum's the word," tortures could not have dragged a syllable from those determined lips. Even the young

billionaire beside her was made to wait till, as he put it, "this row 's over," before she would discuss the dinner which she had agreed to chaperon, where he would personate the Warden of Sing Sing, and his guests would march in, in lockstep, wearing numbers and stripes. Slipping past these obstacles, none of whom he regarded as in any proper sense human beings, Denys stood by the chair of Mrs. Fanning, Mr. Burnham's sister.

"Why, Denys," she whispered in surprise, "I thought you never left the wings."

"But you were never before in the audience, Aunt Alice."

The young girl leaning, absorbed, over the box-rail started at the sound of his low voice, and turned to him.

"Oh, Mr. Alden, the half was not told me."

Mrs. Fanning began a sentence. With a disregard too unconscious to be rude, Denys dropped into the empty chair beside her daughter.

"Miss Fanning, you are really pleased?"

"You did not half prepare me."

"I was afraid. I dared not boast lest you be disappointed."

"Disappointed? I don't know whether I am on the solid earth."

"I know that I am in heaven. To have you feel as I do!"

She dropped her eyes before his ardent gaze, then looked at him again with an earnestness that overcame her hesitation.

"Mr. Alden, I—I don't want to rush in where angels fear to tread, but—does to-night atone to you for your own calamity?"

"My calamity?" he echoed. "Oh, you mean the failure of my singing-voice?"

The girl laughed gently. "I am answered, if you don't even remember your misfortune. Mother told me that, at the time, you called the loss of your career the 'Great Renunciation.'"

"It was rather a tragedy then," he conceded. "You see, though my mother gave up her profession when she married, she made our home a very heaven of music. I never had a wish or an expectation but to follow in her footsteps. My father wished it, too, in a sort of passionate loyalty to her memory and an understanding of all that she had given up for him. And I did have the voice, and the temperament, and a tremendous power of work, and a love of art that was— Oh, well! You know how it happened. Over-training broke my voice, as I could snap the stem of that rose

of yours—just as irrevocably." He fell silent, his mobile face dropping into the lines it had worn then. Margery looked as if, in the very face of Mrs. Nortie, she was about to take his hand.

He shook an elf-lock back from his forehead, tossing away the black remembrance with it.

"But, Miss Fanning, I've gained more—far more—than I ever lost. This boy's voice—did you ever hear tone more golden? He has the physique that I never had, the good looks. He is the artist born. Yes, to-night does atone—a thousand times. To have him succeed—why, it 's a thousand thousand times better than to have my old dream come true."

"You are very generous to find your best happiness in another man's triumph."

"Oh, but it is *my* triumph. I discovered Tolna. I have brought him up from a schoolboy, wakened the sleeping genius, trained him by my own methods, arranged his every appearance."

The frank admiration in her eyes gave place to a twinkle of mischief. "Ah, yes, you told me that you always see him made up, and decide every fold of his costumes. Then,

from the wings, you watch every gesture, gage every note?"

"Why, of course. It is only by such means that you reach success."

"So, naturally, you call it *your* success? I wonder what Monsieur Tolna calls it?"

Denys's dark cheek reddened, for Margery's lightest dart could find the joints of his harness.

She went on reflectively. "I have known young people who were proud of the tricks they had taught their dogs and horses, but I have never before met the owner of a trick tenor."

"Now, that 's as unkind as it is unfair, and quite unworthy of you, Miss Fanning." Denys was stung to retort. "It is not I who relegate the very greatest singer of our day to the same category with a performing dog. My share in his triumph is a very humble one. I have taught him the mechanics of his profession. I have made sure that his splendid gifts should not be wasted. When he was ready for it, I took him to Sbriglia. But the voice, the brain, the art, the passion, all are his."

If she felt the reproof, she had not the grace to acknowledge it.

"Mr. Alden," she murmured, "how can you set the example of talking through the music?" and, turning her pretty profile toward him, she ostentatiously forgot his existence.

Careless of the stage, he tried to read her inscrutable face. Did she really think him an egotist? Could she believe that he—he, of all men—deprecated Tolna's achievement? Did she seriously bid him mend his manners?

Quiet Mrs. Fanning smiled. She thought she knew her exquisite Margery. It was amusing, the seriousness with which the lover took these feints of the tricksy maiden, who obviously teased herself not less than him by her alternate advances and retreats.

With a shock, Denys perceived that the act was finished. The whole house, floor, boxes, galleries, was with one impulse cheering the performance. The curtain rose again and again, till at length *Elsa,* in her satin and pearls, and *Lohengrin,* in his glittering breastplate, came hand in hand along the footlights to take the applause. And when, distinct above the clapping, stamping, and cries of "Bravo!" came repeated calls of "Tolna! Tolna!" *Elsa,* laughing and curtseying to her companion, drew her hand away and ran from

the stage, leaving the young tenor alone to his triumph.

Tall, slender, straight, his silver armor against the dark curtain gleaming with unearthly radiance, his outstretched hand grasping his shining sword, his great, grave eyes looking not at, but past, the audience, like eyes that see visions,—he was the very incarnation of the militant angel, heaven-sent to champion the innocent, to right distresses.

For one moment he stood absolutely still, his sword, held just below the hilt, lifted up, as a cross might be lifted to bless and fortify. Then, with so swift a movement that one could hardly say he went, he was gone.

A sigh and a shiver ran over the vast house.

Tears swimming in her eyes, Margery Fanning stood poised at the very edge of the box, as if about to take wing. Mrs. Fanning smiled as her handkerchief touched her eyes.

"Denys, it is a triumph! I have never seen a self-conscious New York audience let itself go like this."

Margery dropped her fan and swept over the costly wreck to his side.

"Mr. Alden, for a moment I thought it was real."

He met her dazzled eyes with proud confidence.

"It is real. Maurus *is* that."

"Not *Lohengrin!* No man could be really *Lohengrin!*"

"*Lohengrin,*" he affirmed, undaunted. "The champion of the oppressed. Miss Fanning, that man has only two interests in life, and one serves the other—his art and his country. Every penny that his singing brings him, he gives to his down-trodden, liberty-loving Hungary. He is as shy of the world, as much out of sympathy with our life, as much wrapt in his own ideals, as a young monk."

"And he sees no one? But of course. How could *Lohengrin* talk to Yankees?"

Her mood now was all sympathy, enthusiasm, reverence, at one with his own mood. He felt that he could say anything to her while her eyes wore that lovely look.

"Oh, Mr. Alden!" Somebody in the next box would not be longer ignored. Resigning himself, he shook hands across the rail with an imposing matron in black velvet.

"Well, Mrs. Hammond, how do you like my boy?"

Her great, dark eyes fixed him tragically.

"Your boy! Your angel! Your knight of the Grail! Oh, Mr. Alden, what a message we have received to-night! I am afraid that most of them will miss the deeper ethical significance—! Unless the mind is attuned spiritually! Still they can't fail to get something, can they? Don't you think, Mr. Alden, that we are in great need of a spiritual awakening?"

"You and I, Mrs. Hammond? Or the wicked rest-of-the-world?"

"New York, Mr. Alden. This great, heartless, money-getting city. In these days of divorces, and—and trusts, you know—"

"And flatiron buildings, and third-rail accidents, and ticket-speculators," Denys prompted, his interest already straying to the silent daughter at her side who offered him not even a look of felicitation.

"Miss Hammond!" he challenged her, abruptly.

In a city of stylish girls,—girls of a certain careful elegance which one finds nowhere but on Manhattan Island,—a city of clever girls, of attractive girls, but hardly of beautiful girls,—Honor Hammond deserved the homage that was hers. In a wilderness of brown heads,—dark brown, light brown, dun, flaxen,

—Honor's amber locks glowed with color and light. The wilderness of girls wore their hair rolled softly to frame their faces, in that kindly fashion so lenient to defects of feature. Honor's hair, parted in the middle and rippling back like the Clytie's, revealed that her features had no defects. Nor was she monotonously blonde. Brows and lashes showed black against her white skin, while her eyes were dark, of what color no one could ever be sure. Blue in some lights, sea-gray sometimes, hazel, violet, black—one gave up trying to fit to them any adjective but lovely.

Now that he had made her turn round, Denys had nothing whatever to say to her; he never had. She did not speak first; she never did. He broke the awkward little pause.

"Miss Hammond, you have n't paid me a single compliment on my star."

"I thought you wanted praise deserved."

He started as if she had struck him.

"Why, what in the—why, don't you approve of him?"

"He flatted twice."

"He did nothing of the kind," sprang to Denys's tongue, but a lady had made the charge. "I didn't observe it," he answered stiffly.

"You were n't listening."

"I have spent eight years of my life listening to Maurus Tolna."

"Then no wonder your attention wanders."

"Evidently I am becoming tone-deaf," Denys answered, bowing and turning away. That he was ruffled he showed as plainly as a pettish child. For comfort he went straight to Margery.

Sitting alone in the front of the box, she did not lower her opera-glasses as he pushed up a chair beside her.

"I can't imagine why I always go up and talk to Miss Hammond," he confided.

"I suppose because you like to."

"But I don't."

"She is the most beautiful girl in New York," Margery said cordially.

"Does the young person think that because she looks like a queen she is privileged to act like one?" Denys grumbled. "Not that I ever saw a queen with her bad manners—or her beauty," he added with a change of tone, as he caught a new view of Honor's head. "Oh, well, what do her manners matter? She is a joy forever."

Margery promptly introduced another subject.

"What day did you say that you would bring Monsieur Tolna to see us?"

Denys smiled. "I don't think I said."

"So much the better. We will fix the evening now, and then mother and I will invite the elect—'the soulful,' as Mrs. Hammond would say—to meet him."

A troubled look succeeded his quick smile.

"You are not in earnest, Miss Fanning? You know how scrupulously I carry out his wish to meet nobody."

"Perhaps we 're not all as barbarian as he thinks us."

"He does n't think you barbarian at all. Merely as alien as if you lived on another planet. He does n't speak English—"

"I suppose he speaks something beside his native Magyar—German or French? Well, so do we."

The furrow was plowed deep on Denys's forehead.

"Miss Fanning, I should like to have *you* know the boy. But he won't mix with people. His art is his life. He is by nature a hermit."

"He 'd come if you asked it. I 'm not people. I 'm Margery Fanning."

"That 's a cogent reason to bring me.

But I 'm very much afraid it won't bring Tolna."

"Evidently you don't wish him to come."

"I don't think he will come. Remember, he is a foreigner and a recluse."

"And your intimate friend, who would do you so slight a favor if you simply asked him."

"You don't understand—or, at least, you won't understand."

"I understand very well." She lifted her glasses to scan the house, but the faces were blurred through sudden tears that surprised herself. Impulsively she turned back to Denys.

"Oh, New York is very different from the Tyrol! There, you seemed to want to confide in me. You talked all the time of your wonderful Tolna. Of course you knew that if you and I were really friends, I must expect some day to meet your *alter ego,* your more than brother. But it seems that, after all, I am just a casual acquaintance, not to be allowed in the same room with the real friend."

"Dear heart!" he protested, too startled to know what he was saying. "You can't mean that! I thought you were just teasing me. If you are really hurt—will you and your

mother come behind the scenes after the opera? I shall bring Maurus to your house on any evening you appoint, but I can't let you say good-night thinking *that* of me."

"Oh, Denys!" Margery cried. "Oh, Mummy! do you hear what Denys says? He is going to take us behind the scenes to meet Tolna."

"To meet Tolna? The illusive, elusive, unapproachable Tolna? Without the paint and the powder?"

"Without the wig and buskin, Aunt Alice."

"But I thought no human eye had ever beheld him off the stage."

"You 'll be the first that ever burst into his private life."

CHAPTER II

TOLNA

LOHENGRIN, finding, after all, that he could not abide a wife made in Germany, decided to emigrate. No storm of applause greeted the final curtain, the crowd being too eager to get away to supper, to dances,—possibly, in rare instances, to bed. But it was a genuine tribute to the performers that the opera was not forgotten the instant the lights were turned on.

"Don't speak to me," Mrs. Norton Burnham bade her assiduous swain. "What do I care about your old favors? I wish we were n't going to supper with you now. I want to be left alone to dream of that Adonis of a *Lohengrin.* I never saw such a beauty in my life."

"But I 've bought the favors already," Willoughby Smith pleaded eagerly. "Gold handcuffs for the girls, life-preservers and jimmies for the men. We 'll light the room

with burglars' lanterns—well, I won't tell you everything, but you can bet that I 've got some of the cutest ideas ever. Now what I want to know is, do they eat off tin plates?"

His face puckered anxiously. Mrs. Burnham removed her mind from *Lohengrin* and applied it to the immediate subject with the vigor which had won for her her well-deserved social eminence.

"I don't remember what we used when I did time. Your next move, Willie, is to interview the Sing Sing warden, and make him let you see them eat. We must have every detail correct, or there 's no point to the thing. And I don't intend to be mixed up in a fizzle."

Mr. Burnham, having aroused himself with reluctance, was talking over the box-rail to the senior partner of Hammond & Clive, Architects. But unless *Lohengrin* had lately concerned himself with B. R. T., they were not speaking of him. Mrs. Hammond, however, had enthusiasm for two.

"That divine Tolna!" she sighed. "How he does make one forget trivialities! After such an evening as this, one is lifted above the carking cares of this world. Tell me, Mrs. Fanning, does Mr. Alden belong to the famous John Alden family?"

"I never asked, Mrs. Hammond; I have not your enthusiasm for pedigrees."

"Say, rather, you have n't had my toil at them. I was obliged to master the subject, you know, when I was chairman of the first Admissions Committee of the Dames."

The two daughters, after a murmured "Miss Hammond," "Miss Fanning," neither joined their mothers' talk nor started a topic of their own. Silence, however, was never conspicuous in Mrs. Hammond's neighborhood. That lady pursued the subject.

"But I should think you must know, Mrs. Fanning. Are n't you related to him?"

"Not at all, though thirty years ago his mother taught him to call me 'Aunt.' When I was a girl, I met her and her husband at a *pension* in Rome. She was the most fascinating creature I ever saw, half Irish, half French, married to a young attaché at the American Legation, who for grace and breeding might have been a prince of the blood. She had been a prima donna and she had the most glorious voice, which her boy—my Denys, a little chap, then, of five or six—had inherited. Years after, he was preparing for opera, with wonderfully brilliant prospects,

when his voice broke down from over-training. It was a tragedy."

"You had kept track of him all these years?"

"I am sorry to say I had not. She and I meant to write always, but you know how that ends. I had n't thought of Denys for twenty years, till, last summer, I met him in the woods of the Tyrol, and those blue eyes in the dark face brought it all back to me. Strange to say, he remembered that he had once had a 'tante Alixe.' "

"What a delightful chance! For I understand that he and Monsieur Tolna are Damon and Pythias."

"Except when Pythias goes yachting. Denys says that a difference of attitude at sea—the contrast between the perpendicular and the horizontal—is a strain on the strongest friendship. Just then Monsieur Tolna was cruising around Cyprus, so that we could only hear about him. It does seem as if Tolna were *sent!* It was in the dark days after his own voice went, when life was a blank to him, that Denys found this boy with the golden throat."

"How touching that is! They say he is a count, too, in Hungary. I suppose you have

been studying astrology this winter, Mrs. Fanning, with everybody else? Only by the theory of conjunction of planets can we account for such a friendship. The dreamy Magyar, the practical American! The palm and the pine!"

"I never saw any palms in Hungary," said Mrs. Fanning, resenting an implied disparagement of the man who had had the grace to remember her after more than five and twenty years. "Denys Alden is worthy the friendship of anybody."

"Oh, he is most attractive," Mrs. Hammond acknowledged graciously. "So accomplished! So original! But of course he 's not Tolna. Surely you, like the rest of us, worship from afar!"

"No; that does n't content us. Margery and I are on our way to meet him behind the scenes."

Mrs. Hammond gasped, but countered admirably.

"Indeed! How awkward it is to meet stage-people! They 're so impossible socially."

Mrs. Burnham, who had ears of the sharpest, broke off in the midst of her mandate to Willie—"You must send the Black Maria

after the guests"—to whirl round on her sister-in-law.

"Is Alden going to take us to meet Tolna?"

"He said just Margery and me," Mrs. Fanning answered, quailing a little.

"He can't very well leave me out—your hostess," Mrs Nortie cried. The other was silent, whereupon Mrs. Burnham's good-humor, never ruffled while she was having her own way, returned in all its native buoyancy. "I 'll take Mr. Smith along. Willie," she cried abruptly, her eyes kindling with inspiration—"Willie, I 'll get Tolna for your dinner. Oh, Mr. Alden," she went on, as Denys reëntered the box, "I want to bring Willie Smith behind to meet Tolna. You don't mind, do you?"

Denys looked a profound regret.

"Unfortunately, I have just promised Tolna to limit myself to two ladies, Mrs. Burnham."

"Oh, all right. Then Willie can wait here with Norton. But you certainly said three ladies, Mr. Alden."

Denys hesitated.

"Suppose," he suggested finally, "that instead of going behind, you all come to supper with me at Sherry's?"

"With you and Tolna?"

"Only with my humble self. Tolna does n't go to suppers."

"Then you 'll not introduce him to Alice and Margery till I 'm out of the way?"

"My dear Mrs. Burnham, I am desolated. But you have heard about Tolna's ways. Apart from professional people, he has n't consented to meet a single stranger. Even I, his manager, have n't asked it. Just now, and with trouble enough, too, I wrung from him permission to bring round my old friend and her daughter. But I had to give him my word to ask no one else. You see, dear lady, I 'm helpless."

"Well!" ejaculated the astonished hostess. "Well!" The explosive force of the monosyllable seemed to bode ill for her guests, when quiet Mr. Burnham intervened with a casual "Come, Jess."

"Good-night, then," she added, with exaggerated courtesy, and swept her chiffon flounces from the box.

"Jessie!" Mrs. Fanning cried. "Jessie! Wait, my dear child," while Denys started in pursuit.

"Mummy! Mr. Alden!" enjoined the imperious Margery, and laughed to see them stop obediently. "I beg your pardon. I

did n't mean to give orders. But really, I never saw two such craven spirits. Jessie runs all New York. Nobody ever says her nay. Do defy the tyrant for once. I saw Uncle Norton's eyes twinkle. I 'm sure he thought it was good for her character."

"I 'm sure she did n't like it," lamented Mrs. Fanning.

"Like it?" laughed Margery. "She was furious. I know *I* should have been, and she's only a year or two older than I am, and not a day wiser. Now, Mummy, do be human enough to enjoy seeing your exuberant young sister-in-law put down."

But not even to please her adored daughter could Mrs. Fanning enjoy anybody's discomfiture.

"Aunt Alice, it was my fault," interposed the contrite Denys: "I left her out just to tease her because she undertook to manage my show. I'm awfully sorry that you are annoyed."

"We ought not to have let you ask us, without her, when we were her guests," grieved Mrs. Fanning. "I do feel most uncomfortably rude."

"Oh, dear Mummy! Must you? Mr. Alden has tried so hard to give us a pleasure."

At this, Mrs. Fanning forgot Jessie's

grievance in contrition for his, and summoned up a smile for him. "Of course, dear. Lead the way, Denys. We are all on fire to meet the hero."

"Mr. Alden," Margery found a chance to say, "you forgive my insistence? After all you have told me, you can't wonder that I long to meet Monsieur Tolna."

"Please forgive my resistance," he answered, and her smile conveyed more than pardon. Yet he felt an unexpected pang. Her interest in Tolna as his friend he had found delightful, but interest in Tolna as Tolna! "Good Lord!" he thought, disgusted at himself, "am I jealous of Maurice?"

As they approached the sacred precincts "behind," Miss Fanning lingered:

"Oh, I half want to go back. He can't be what I think he is."

"Wait," Denys answered simply, knocking at a closed door, once white but now gray, scrawled over in pencil with the heart-thrilling names of famous singers.

A quivering moment of expectancy, and the hero came out under the crude electric light.

Tall, he was lent an air of greater height by the fur-lined overcoat falling to his feet.

His hair, now that *Lohengrin's* flaxen curls were gone, was dark brown, thick and wavy. His pale, distinguished face bore the indefinable but unmistakable look of race; his eyes, almond-shaped under wide, level brows, were grave as with all the sorrows of the world. He bowed deeply, in silence, to each of the ladies, as Denys pronounced their names.

Margery swept a curtsey. Mrs. Fanning, feeling that the occasion demanded an unusual speech, tried vainly to think of one. "Denys," she murmured, "he certainly does make one feel that one ought to kiss his hand." Slipping easily into French, she bespoke Tolna: "You should be very happy, monsieur, in the power to give so much pleasure to others."

The singer bowed again without speaking, the melancholy of his face unaltered.

"These ladies are my oldest friends, Maurus," Denys explained.

Bowing again, Tolna looked from one to the other of them, without a word, with no slightest change of expression. Mrs. Fanning could not feel encouraged to linger. She bestowed on the genius her pretty, conciliatory smile.

"We are greatly privileged, Monsieur

Tolna, to be allowed to tell you how much we admire your work. I have heard many *Lohengrins;* never a greater one than to-night. And now we must not trespass longer."

"You did n't think him rude, Aunt Alice?" Denys besought eagerly, as they groped their way down the dark steps. "You see what I mean about dreading to force introductions upon him. He does n't mean to be rude. He simply does n't know how to make conversation for the inhabitants of another world."

"Oh, I 'm so glad that he did n't speak." Margery answered for her mother. "He could n't have said anything half so fine as his silence. You 'd as soon expect Watts's *Galahad* to talk to you. I am so happy."

"I am so glad," said Denys, truly, with recovered loyalty to his friend.

Leaving his companions in the lobby while he looked up his brougham, he did not notice Mrs. Burnham waiting with Mr. Smith while the executive husband hurried her carriage. But she, whom nothing escaped, noticed him, and turned upon the ladies with her dazzling smile.

"Dear Alice," she said, "you have such a gift for training. Margy is such a success.

If you do get Denys Alden for her, just teach him manners, too. If he had the most rudimentary notions of behavior, he would n't be a bad match, and we 'd all give him the glad hand."

Her clear voice carried far, and several heads turned. Margery, scarlet to her ears, could find no voice to retort. Mrs. Fanning lacked the retort. To make matters worse, Denys chose this instant for his return.

Quite satisfied that she bore away the honors of war, Mrs. Burnham departed with another suave good-night.

"Here 's the brougham, Aunt Alice. Why, what is the matter?"

"Jessie Burnham's impertinence."

Denys looked at her in exaggerated surprise.

"Aunt Alice, Mrs. Nortie must have out-Heroded Herod if *you* call her impertinent. What did she say?"

"You did n't hear?"

"I did n't even see her. Honor Hammond was just going by."

"Come along, pussy." The mother was all smiles again, but the girl's face and voice were cold.

"Please tell the man to take us home, Mr. Alden. I 'm too tired to go to supper."

"Oh, but you said you would," he pleaded, while Mrs. Fanning motioned with her lips, "Better come, pet." But Margery replied in a weary voice that matched her words:

"The music was too exciting. Mr. Alden, won't you excuse us?"

He had so counted on another hour of happy talk. With a sigh, he put the ladies in the brougham and gave the chauffeur their address.

"My dear Denys," Mrs. Fanning protested, "you 'll take us home, not send us? We can't wrest your automobile from you."

"Perhaps Miss Fanning had rather be alone with you," Denys answered wistfully.

"Yes, to-night, thank you, Mr. Alden. You are always considerate."

"Margy, why did you punish him so?" Mrs. Fanning demanded, as the automobile rolled out into Broadway. "He had n't even committed the crime of hearing what Jessie said."

Despite the uncertain light of the streets, she could see the red burn in Margery's cheeks, while her voice shook.

"I won't endure having people hand me over to—" to say his name was impossible.

"My dear child, nobody is handing you over, least of all your mother, who dreads the very thought of giving up her daughter."

Margery's hand slid into that kind elder hand that had never failed her.

"You 're always lovely, Mummy. But—oh, dear, because one finds a person pleasant to talk to, does that excuse Jessie's outrageous insin—" she broke off, choked with an angry disgust, while her mother stroked her hair in silent consolation. When Margery spoke again, the voice that a moment ago had trembled with wrath trembled with laughter. "Besides, if I must be credited with possessing Mr. Alden, I will possess him. He sha'n't go mooning after any beautiful Miss Hammonds."

"Oh, Madge! is that it? He does n't care a straw for Honor Hammond."

Margery laughed again, snuggling up to her mother's shoulder like an affectionate kitten.

"To tell the truth, Mummy, I am not much worried over Honor. But it was such fun to give old Denys a shock."

Meantime, Denys, plodding home across the snow-covered city, was wondering whether

his divinity was merely tired, or, for some inexplicable reason, offended. She was not very strong, he knew; yet a moment before she had seemed in the highest spirits. But how could he have displeased her? If Mrs. Burnham had been rude about him, as he was keen enough to guess, why must Margery lay his enemy's sins on his shoulders?

By turns, his mind supported each possibility, as a juggler tosses yet another and another ball. He might have distracted himself for hours over the problem, but that, as he neared his house, old habit appealed to the ruling passion of his life—concern for Maurice Tolna. "I need n't have sent him home alone, and I ought n't to," he thought, as he visualized the tenor's carriage wrecked by a trolley-car. "And how could I have let him stand indoors with his fur coat on?" A sudden apprehension of hazard to the singer's wonderful high C smote him with a physical pang.

Convinced that something must have gone wrong, since to acknowledge that all might go right, was to deny the indispensability of Mr. Denys Alden,—he crossed Park Avenue and turned down his own block. There were few lamp-posts, and most of the houses were

dark. Suddenly he quickened his pace, as he detected, across the way, the figure of a man lounging against an area railing, apparently in deep study of the building that sheltered the eminent Tolna.

"Burglar or reporter?" wondered Denys, just as the policeman on the beat neared the lurking prowler. His hand rested easily on his night-stick as he said with jaunty politeness, "Good avenin'."

"Good evening, Dillon," came the ready answer. "Easy with that plaything; I 'm just taking my evening stroll."

The lounger slid off the rail, removing his hat.

Dillon exclaimed, "Mr. Tolna! Well, I 'm dommed! To hear you talk United States!"

CHAPTER III

MAURICE

"WHY not? I was n't born in County Clare," the tenor retorted, as Denys seized his arm.

"Maurice, art thou mad, then?" he said in rapid French. "Come into the house and hold thy tongue, idiot that thou art!"

"All right," acquiesced the Hungarian patriot. "Come along, Dillon, and have a drink."

"An' I med a shtep forward to accept his invitation," Mr. Dillon explained, some days later, to an enterprising reporter, "whin I see Mr. Alden's face under the gas-light. Well, you bet I did n't go. I says, 'Thankin' ye kindly, sor, but I can't lave me bate.' An' he says,—the dago, I mane,—'Nayther can I, worse luck! Good-night, Mr. Dillon.' "

On their own steps, out of the policeman's hearing, Denys burst out, "In the name of common sense, why English?"

Before Tolna could answer, the door was flung open by an agitated valet.

"Ah, Monsieur Aldanne, how I am glad that you arrive. My monsieur, I could do nothing with him. He would stand himself in the snow—the melting snow, monsieur."

"The snow melts—I don't," the guilty one retorted, as François rid him of fur coat and overshoes.

"No, monsieur! But if monsieur's voice melts, and then monsieur's dollars?"

"Then I will go valeting some other poor devil of a singer, and make his life a burden, as François has taught me how."

"The first thing," announced Denys, who, not being a celebrated singer, had taken off his own coat and overshoes—"the first thing on the program is to make you a hot Scotch."

Half-way up the stairs the other turned with a flashing smile. "Oh, Denys, let it be the last, too!"

His keeper sprang after him. Tolna cleared the rest of the flight four steps at a time, at the top suddenly letting out the full volume of his magnificent voice:

"Oh, let me the cannikin clink, clink,
And let me the cannikin clink!"

The chandelier in the library shook, and all its old-fashioned prisms rang. Denys flung himself on the singer.

"Stop it, you loon! They 'll hear you in the next house."

"Be a treat for 'em. Never mind me, Denny; hurry up that Scotch.

> "'The tenor 's a man—
> Man's life 's but a span:
> Why, then let the tenor drink.'"

"He seems not to have waited for leave."

Maurice's beautiful, mournful face might have melted the heart of a gargoyle.

"Commentary on the life of a much-envied singer! Whenever he shows the least indication of good spirits, his friends conclude them to be alcoholic. Oh, mine is a gay life! No, father confessor; I have touched not, tasted not, handled not. But, beginning with the pleasant poison you thrust upon me, henceforth do I drown my sorrows in the bowl! A good scheme, eh, François?" And he repeated the proposition in laborious French. François smiled, as one humors a child's vagaries.

"It might be agreeable. Monsieur's career, however—"

"Oh, damn my career!"

"You came near damning it yourself, Maurice. What possessed you to camp in a snowdrift after singing?"

"I was enjoying a view of my cage from the outside. Bars look so much prettier from without than from within."

Denys eyed his friend curiously; looked away, resolved to mind his own business; looked back again, and spoke.

"What is the matter, boy? You 've been out of sorts for a month."

"Can't you let a poor singer have even a grouch in peace?"

"I can't understand the wherefore of it. You 're making fifty thousand a year; you 're the idol of the hour—"

"I suppose you mean the letters I never read, from women I never heard of."

"That 's your loss. A look at them would cure *Hamlet's* melancholy."

"Not if they were written to him. They make me sick."

"I 'm going to publish a book some day," Denys mused. "'The Matinée Girl's Complete Letter-Writer and Hero-Worshiper's Guide.' There was one note, yesterday, beginning: 'I could not write to you, a

stranger, did I not feel that so beautiful a face—'"

"Shut up, you ass!"

"I 'm not composing it. It was in your mail yesterday. '—that so beautiful a face must be the symbol of a beautiful soul—'"

A sofa-pillow took him full in the mouth, thence to fall on his glass and break it.

"You 're not cut, Denys? No, I see it is n't cut glass," Tolna answered himself, as he bent to pick up the fragments. But Alden cried out with his never-sleeping anxiety:

"Maurice, don't touch it! Ring for François."

With a groan of disgust, the tenor flung himself down on the divan, his face against the wall. François, coming in, was bidden to clear away the breakage. His master rolled over, fixing the valet with a solemn eye.

"François, what dost think of a pretended friend, a traitor, who makes himself to cut the throat of his unsuspecting comrade, his brother of the heart, with a piece of glass?"

The valet looked bewildered. "But monsieur is not hurt?"

Maurice clutched the man's wrist. His voice was intense, his eyes glittered.

"No, not to-night. To-night, seest thou, I

foiled him. But for this long time he seeks to kill me. Inch by inch, day by day, for a long, long time. He sucks out my life as a vampire sucks blood. Understandest thou?"

It was evident that François was far from understanding. Held in Maurice's tight grip, he glanced at "Monsieur Aldanne," frightened, incredulous, suspicious, altogether puzzled. His eyes, slinking away from the indignant glance they encountered, fell again on his master's tense face.

"Monsieur," he stammered—"monsieur, it seems impossible."

"Monsieur jests," Denys interrupted sharply. "Go!"

François obeying with all alacrity, Denys broke into unwilling laughter.

"How old are you, Maurice? Ten? For a minute that fool believed you."

The tenor sat up, smoothing back the straggling hair that had lent so much to his dramatic effect.

"Ha! ha! scoffer, am I then great? You always say that I can't act. You see for yourself that I can, only your rotten operas don't give my genius any scope."

"I 'll let Weber and Fields have you."

"Do! That 's just in my line. I 'd sing 'em Jeames's song:

> "R. Hangeline, R. Lady Mine,
> Dost thou rem-e-em-ber Jeames? "

till there was n't a dry eye in the house. No, I would n't, though; I 'm sick of the footlights."

"I wish you 'd confide in your anxious manager. What is the matter with you? It is n't overwork, that I 'll swear. And it is n't nerves, for I 've known you fourteen years, and you have n't any. As far as I can see, everything is lovely and the goose hangs high. I can only conclude that you 're in love."

Maurice ejaculated a sound between a laugh and a snort.

"In love? Me?"

"Yes, you."

"Gad! I wish I was. But where under the canopy do I meet anybody to fall in love with?"

"Well, I have suspected it was Arnheim."

Maurice groaned. "Arnheim? Arn—? Great Scott! man, she 's an opera-singer."

"Does that make you immune?"

"Might n't some Johnnies, perhaps," he

conceded doubtfully. "I 'd as soon cherish a tender passion for that andiron. Lord, how I hate everything that has to do with the life!"

"You have been in the life, studying and performing, for eight years. I never heard you say a word against it before. If it is n't a woman that has upset you, then what the deuce is it?"

Maurice, looking down into the fire, smiled a tender smile, such as the sweetheart he denied might well have been happy to inspire.

"Don't you really know what it is, Denys? It 's New York."

His comrade looked blank.

Maurice amplified. "Little old New York, where I was born. I was all right till you brought me here. Over there, I did n't mind the confinement. There was nothing to be confined from—"

"Paris, Rome, Vienna, nothing? O ye gods!"

"Well, I suppose I am the only good American who does n't want to go to Paris when he dies. I might like it if I had seen it first as a man. But it 's no place for a boy. And what an awfully forlorn youngster I was! I had just lost father and mother and two setter puppies. Besides, the grocer from Sixth

Avenue who bought our house threw my telephone—my telephone, that I had made myself—into the ash-barrel. I saw it there. Then you took me away from my school and my playmates, and put me where I could n't speak a word of the language and had to play with mocking little French boys in buttoned kid shoes. Sometime I am going to have a model made of Paris—like the ones in architectural shows—and kick it!"

"But that homesickness was only at first. You outgrew it."

"Oh, yes; but I never outgrew remembering that early misery, and chalking it up against Paris. Then we moved on to Heidelberg, for me to learn German; and because I came from France, young Germany had no use for me. By the time we went to Rome I was hardened. Not that I love Rome more, but other places less. Then came Berlin, Dresden, Paris again, Vienna, St. Petersburg. They were all much of a muchness to me. I never really liked any of 'em, but by this time I had forgotten what home was like. And when the Americans over there told me how dirty and noisy and ugly and crude and sordid and vulgar New York was, I believed 'em. Bless its heart!"

Denys's face was lighted with a keen interest.

"Curious," he commented. "Most children that are educated abroad never feel at home in the States afterwards. I came home at twenty and stuck it out one winter; hated my country every hour of that time. And now, if this was n't Tom Tiddler's ground, I 'd go back to-morrow. Let 's see; you were fourteen when I took you across, and you were there thirteen years. Then you strike American soil and rave like this."

"Reversion to type. Ever hear of a savage rescued by missionaries, brought up by sound Evangelicals, and sent home to bring sweetness and light to the tribe? What 's he doing, the end of the second week? Why, helping his three wives eat his grandmother."

"So you want to 'revert,' do you?"

"In the first place," mused Maurice—"in the first place, I want to be obliged to get up early. Oh, yes; I know I sleep like a pig till noon, but I can't enjoy it because it 's my duty to sleep late. If it was my duty to get up early, how I should revel in lazy Sundays, reading the papers in bed! Week-days, I should have breakfast at half-past seven—fruit, oatmeal, and beefsteak and fried pota-

toes, and hot biscuits and waffles. Then I should take a Fourth Avenue car—"

"And hang on to a strap for forty-two blocks."

"Glad of the chance. You have n't let me ride on a trolley-car once, for fear of microbes, and in the old days there were n't any trolleys; only yellow horse-cars on Broadway, and red on Fourth Avenue," Maurice complained. "Well, anyhow, I 'd go down to my office to scratch round all day for a living, in company with a crowd of my fellow-townsmen of precisely my aims and ideals. Then I should come home to dinner at half-past six, —seven, when we had company,—and in the evening I should take my wife to the theater—"

"Then there *is* a girl in it?"

" Yes, there 's a dream-girl that wears light blue."

"Well, of all the bourgeois ideals—"

"That 's what I am—bourgeois to the backbone. Nobody knows it better than you."

Denys's face puckered into laughter. "It 's the biggest joke in the world. Here are you with your wonderful voice and perfect ear and perfect physique for singing. And you are no more a musician than the boy that

hands out the programs. You 've got that beautiful, high-bred face—don't throw any more pillows, I beseech you! I am not complimenting you. I am merely enumerating the firm's assets. You have extraordinary personal beauty, and such pleading eyes that nobody can look at you without wanting to give you a bone. If there were ever anybody born who ought to have the finer feelings, it is you. But behind that romantic façade of yours, you have n't any more soul—"

"Than a Tammany heeler?"

"If you like. When I took you, you were as commonplace a little animal as it has ever been my misfortune to encounter. But I said to myself that all growing boys' souls were in their stomachs; that you must become more interesting by and by. When you began your singing again, I was sure that the temperament would show. You used your voice beautifully, precisely as you were taught; and you sang sweetly, melodiously, always on the key, and always exactly as if you were singing scales. *Romeo* or *Tannhäuser* or *Don Giovanni*—it was all one to you. You sang them all in the same faithful, conscientious, damned uninterested, uninteresting way. I can tell you, sonny, black care sat on

my shoulders. I was fairly tearing my hair when an inspiration came to me. It would wake you up to fall in love."

Maurice, stretched out on the divan, listened with the bored patience of a child helpless to stop its elders' irrelevant conversation. Denys was thoroughly in the swing of his recital, his eyes dancing with reminiscent amusement.

"I could n't get rid of the notion that you must be romantic. Who would n't believe it, to look at you? So I gave you every opportunity to fall in love with the Princess Ilsa, a fairy-book princess,—you 'll admit that,—even to the golden hair; young, lovely, of the proudest race. All Europe went mad about her that year, I know. But she did n't please your highness. 'Doughface,' I believe, was your flattering term."

"There 's no use falling in love with a princess. What could she be to me?"

"Practical to the last! Oh, I saw at once it would n't work. Well, since you would n't cherish an ideal passion, I tried you with an earthly one. I flung you at Liane de Lancy. I thought she would wake you up, if anybody could. But you said that you liked more soap and less scent."

"Well, so I do. Give me Croton, and keep your cosmetics."

"Hear the man from Podunk!"

Maurice sat up.

"Oh, yes, I 'm from Podunk, if you call this Podunk—and I suppose a cultured person like you does. I 'm a Podunker, and I glory in my shame. I was born in West Ninth Street, and named after Gouverneur Morris, though you will call me Maurice—"

"Sounds so much better."

"Sounds like O'Flaherty."

"And Morris sounds like Ickleheimer."

"Maurice is n't convincingly Hungarian, either."

"But remember I had called you that for years before I found out that you were Hungarian. It 's Maurus on the billboards. But I scorn to deceive, boy. When people question me, I always say quite frankly that your name is assumed. Tolna is the province where your father's estates—"

"Where you once spent a vacation."

"No, I was never in Tolna," Denys answered seriously. "But I particularly fancy the name. It makes one think of Talma, and puts one in an expectant-of-dramatic-genius

frame of mind. There 's a great deal in a name."

"Oh, well, the name does n't matter. What I do kick about is the slavery of the existence. I don't even get the customary Sunday out. If I were a maniac, you and François could n't shadow me more closely. If I were the last feeble scion of a royal race, you could n't pamper me more. You won't even let me speak my own language, for fear somebody will find out that I 'm a plain Yankee—"

"But you know as well as I do how things went on the other side, boy. They all said that you were handsome and that you had a good voice, even an unapproachable voice, but no magnetism, no temperament, no art. After my eight years of slaving at you, you would never have got even a fourth-rate engagement in your life if Hirt had n't seen you and booked you on your looks."

"And given *you* a chance to make Ananias look like a timid amateur."

"Hirt gave me the idea when he said, 'I don't care whether he can sing or not, he 'll fetch the women.' "

"Some day, confound you, I shall murder you, Denny!"

"We both know, sonny, that on the other

side they don't care much about the personality of artists. It is enough that they are artists. Over here, the personality is the whole thing. So I made up my mind that I would n't stop at showing New York your good looks—I 'd just fit you out with a halo of romance. Most romantic people in the world, Americans. Nothing is too preposterous for them to credit."

"You ought to know. If they 'll believe you, they 'll believe Munchausen."

"Therefore, dear boy, you 're a Hungarian patriot. I could n't make you French or German or Italian, because you speak them all as if you had learned them at a New York School of Languages—*Spanish Language and Literature taught in Ten Lessons*—that sort of thing. Any intelligent person would find you out at the second sentence. Now, on the other hand, nobody speaks Magyar, and nobody knows much about Hungary. It is a beautiful, romantic country, vaguely and delightfully associated with Tokay, gipsy-music, and Kossuth—"

"And the other mutton, in the Fifth Reader, who Shrieked when Freedom fell."

"Kosciuszko was a Pole, but no matter. You simply prove my point that the average

idiot does n't know any difference. Well, Maurice, even you must admit that, being a Hungarian, you had to be a patriot, as a matter of course. The dear public remembers that Hungary is oppressed, though, to save their lives, they could n't tell what oppresses her—"

"They may remember the members of the Diet shying inkstands at one another."

"—and they love patriotism, when it does n't cost them anything. They are charmed to have *you* devote your fortune to freeing Hungary."

"As you swear to 'em that I do. The barefaced humbug of it makes me sick."

Denys straightened up with fire in his eyes.

"You make me sicker! I always knew that you were a Philistine and a Podunker, but I never before suspected you of hankering for the ranks of the Truly Good. Don't talk cant, Maurice."

"If you call it cant to object to obtain money on false pretenses—"

"No false pretenses about it. You are hired to sing. Well, you fill the contract by singing to the best of your abilities. To-night you went off the key twice, which you never do except when you are careless. You can be

conscience-stricken over that, if you like. But don't, for heaven's sake, get an attack of virtue because I fool a crowd of silly women who love to be fooled."

"Well, if you think it a joke—"

"Of which the cream is that you don't."

"It dims the dazzling humor of a joke to be the butt of it."

"The dear public is the butt. You are—well, the butting agency."

"The goat? That 's what I complain of."

"My dear fellow," Denys protested seriously, "it is a perfectly legitimate advertising dodge. A little newer than having one's diamonds stolen, that 's all. Every star has a press-agent to circulate legends about him; sallies of wit, or touching domestic anecdotes. I flatter myself that I do the trick rather better. Besides, I wanted to see how much the public really would swallow. And they swallowed you whole."

"Good simile! Your methods make me feel like a patent medicine."

"My young friend, you are suffering from the big-head."

"I? The most disgusted man in America?"

"You think that you amount to something on your own merits. You have n't any. You

can't sing. You can't act. You can't feel. Oh, I admit that you produce beautiful tone, but that is n't singing. Morris Fordham going to the opera-house to render a part, as he would go to a coal-yard to shovel egg, singing stolidly for three hours, and going home again with a 'Thank God, that 's over!' is, by your leave, an utterly uninteresting person. Nobody would pay to hear him twice. But the man of my creation, Maurus Tolna, dreamer and patriot, brooding over the sorrows of his bleeding country, and occasionally, it must be confessed, forgetting to act—how can anybody censure him when all his actions glitter in the limelight of romance? Critics forbear, reporters stand about you, ten deep, and the letters you receive each morning from total strangers who ought to know better hang a paper-and-rubbish sign in our basement window every day in the week."

"And you call that success?"

"I call it dollars. Besides—" the red burned again in Denys's dusky cheek—"I don't expect you to understand me, Maurice. *You* could n't. But I think I 'll mention it, for once. So far as I was concerned, there had to be a Tolna. He was ready to my hand—except the soul. Lord, how it hurt when I had to

give up that! Give it up? Maurice, I could n't give it up! Who said that if there were n't a God, man would have to invent one? Why, he has always been inventing them, because he could n't live without. Well, that was my case. Old Wordsworth saw into things when he wrote, 'We live by admiration.' I know that I do. I understand, now, how hard it has been on you, my boy; but to me— Oh, well, what is the use?"

Maurice was sobered for a moment. Then he began to laugh, again.

"You 're a queer mixture, Denny. I have n't done you justice, really. Well, you 've shown me the Me, as you see it—or was it the not-Me? Now this is how I see you. You 'd be perfectly happy if I really were Maurus Tolna. For years you hoped against hope that I was. Then, when you had to admit that it was n't in me, you must go to work and make your romantic hero to your own order. You simply had to have one to play with. You took almost as much comfort out of Tolna as if he were n't merely something you 'd faked up out of your own inner consciousness. You know you love bamboozling an audience about Tolna's romantic history and medieval idiocies, and you half

deceive yourself while you 're doing it. But at the same time you never lose sight of the fact that you wholly deceive your audience, which tickles you to the last extent. You do it for the dollars, and you don't do it for the dollars. You do it partly to prove what fools these mortals be, and partly because you enjoy working your imagination, like a kid playing make-believe soldiering. And partly—yes, I do believe that by some strange twist your sense of the ideal has got snarled up in it. Denys, there 's a fence down the middle of your brain. One side is a wild-oats tangle of craziness, and the other is a neat little potato-patch of practicality."

"Then come and play in my potato-patch; and say that you like the dollars."

"Have n't I said that I 'm an American? I like one other thing, too, Denny," Maurice's smile was boyishly sweet. "I like paying you back the time and patience and trouble and affection you 've spent on me. If I growl, it is to hear myself talk. Good-night, old boy."

The ruling passion sent Denys into the hall at his protégé's heels.

"Maurice, the wind is on your side to-night. Don't open your window at the bottom."

"Good Lord!" growled Maurice.

CHAPTER IV

TOLNA GOES INTO SOCIETY

ON the next Sunday evening, the distinguished Tolna stood admiring his reflection in the cheval-glass.

"For the first time in America,"—he indicated his dress-clothes to Denys. "Does Mrs. Fanning say that on her program?"

"Don't worry. Every person there understands that you never have been and never will be inside another New York house."

"I hope Miss Fanning appreciates the sacrifice that 's offered on her altar."

"Perhaps you don't think that it *is* a sacrifice to break through my isolation policy? Though it may not turn out so badly, to let fifty or sixty of the best people see you at close range—just once. Twice would make you cheap; once may be good advertising. Anyhow, I 've got to be resigned. She had set her heart on it. And when a woman wants her own way, you might as well compromise."

"On what?"

"On letting her have it."

Maurice struck an attitude. "Never! Never give in to 'em. Liberty or death! When your legs are shot away, fight upon your stumps. While one predatory woman remains on this soil, never lay down your arms; never, never, never!"

"If you don't lay down your arms, you 'll ruin the set of your shirt-bosom."

François hastened to give the shirt-bosom a little pat, the white waistcoat a little tug, and opined that garments could not look more perfect. As he spoke, Maurice addressed him in a stage whisper:

"To-night he plans death for me. But my eye is on his every movement. I will foil him yet. Do thou pray for me. And get my overcoat."

"Maurice, don't be such an ass," growled Denys. "That man takes every word for gospel. He will be afraid to stay in the same house with me."

"That 's the fun."

"The first thing you know, he will be telling the neighbors that I have designs on your life."

"Very likely. When you first hired him, I

complained that he was stupid. You said you chose a stupid one, so that he would n't see through me. Now you know what you 've brought on yourself."

In the automobile, Denys demanded with an abruptness that masked some hesitation:

"How do you like Miss Fanning?"

He had not mentioned her name since Friday, a reticence from which Maurice drew his own conclusions.

While she had been only a name to him, only the girl whom, for the last month, Denys had stolen away to Lakewood to visit over Sundays, Maurice had found all a school-boy's joy in chaffing his friend about her; but to-night he answered seriously:

"I thought her very pretty and sweet."

Denys expanded. "They 're the nicest people in New York. So simple and well-bred. And really musical. Not of the sham-artistic tribe. I value the mother dearly for my dead mother's sake—"

"And the daughter for her own." But this mild statement was all the commentary Maurice allowed himself. "I dare say the mother is all your fancy paints her, too, even if she did discuss me to my face, as if I were

a child or a servant, not supposed to have any feelings."

"But, my dear fellow, I tell everybody that you don't understand a word of English."

"Then it was all the ruder."

"But she complimented you."

"Oh, of course. If she had said, 'This seems to me a very commonplace young man, with nothing about him to make a fuss over,' I should have asked her to be mine."

"Oh, well, Maurice, while you 're inhaling incense with every breath you draw, it 's a very good pose to say that you don't like the odor. You 'd be mighty forlorn without it, let me tell you. As Morris Fordham, broker's clerk, you would n't find life worth living."

"If I thought that was true, I 'd put a bullet through my head now. If I thought that all I live for is the adulation of a lot of idle people who don't know the sham from the real—"

"You live for Art."

"Hang Art!"

"Chut!" said Denys, as he usually did at this stage of their conversations.

Presently he pursued his reflections aloud: "Fortunately Mrs. Fanning does n't train

with a crowd that pretends to know anything. They 're not chromo-musical, thank heaven! They won't want to talk shop. They will be perfectly delighted to meet you, and Mrs. Norton Burnham will ask you to sit in her opera-box on Wednesday night. And you 'll thank her but be obliged to decline, because you sing the leading rôle yourself. And she 'll say: 'Oh, how funny! I had n't noticed.' "

" Denys, they 'll know I 'm American."

" Not if you remember to speak no English and as little as possible of anything else. I 'll be at your elbows to do the talking. It 's my aim to make yours a thinking part."

Coming down from their third-story dressing-room, Denys clutched Maurice's arm.

" There 's that sulky Hammond girl. Jove! she 's lovely, though."

She was waiting in the hall, in a yellow frock that matched her hair, a long amber chain falling from her white throat to her knees. Her eyes, upturned to the two men, were dark as pools in a fir forest. Denys ran down to ask her:

" Where did you leave the Dragon-ship? "

She bestowed on him a glance which said

that she did not know what he meant, nor care. He was undismayed.

"Don't tell me that you live in New York, for I know that you have just sailed hither from Markland, with Leif the Lucky. Don't tell me what your name is, for I know perfectly well that it 's Sigrid the Haughty."

She spoke now in the level, colorless voice that made her words sound as if she were repeating a part learned by rote:

"That is prettier than 'that sulky Hammond girl.'" Her eyes on her victim, she did not note Maurice's unmannerly stare.

Denys, though startled, was by no means silenced.

"Jolly good discipline you maintain on the Dragon-ship. What happens to a rower who displeases you?"

"I was never displeased on the Dragon-ship."

"You were never called sulky?"

"I never *was* sulky."

"Oh, no wonder Leif was named the Lucky!"

All good-humor now, Denys made amends to her by presenting the Celebrity.

She bowed without speaking, almost without looking at the singer, who murmured

something in a low voice, of which "*charmé*" was the only word audible. At this moment Mrs. Hammond sailed out of the dressing-room. She greeted Monsieur Tolna with a stately hand and excellent French.

"Monsieur, this is indeed a pleasure, actually to converse with him whom one has so long looked upon as a dear friend. Have you ever reflected, monsieur, that perhaps your truest friends, the friends who respond to you most perfectly, whose souls are in the deepest accord with your soul, are those whose names, even, you do not know, whose faces you never see, who sit in the darkness on the far side of the dazzling foot-lights that irradiate you, who attempt no brilliancy of their own, but are content to feel their triumph in your triumph, to believe that they also serve who simply listen and—"

"Applaud," prompted Denys. "That is how audiences serve, Mrs. Hammond. Maurus quite appreciates their value." The "dear friend" said nothing. His eyes had scarcely moved from Honor's face.

The girl met his stare with no more response, either of pleasure or offense, than if she had been a waxen beauty in a hair-dresser's window; presently suggesting in her

curious toneless voice, " Suppose we go downstairs, mother? "

Mrs. Hammond hesitated. She was enjoying the situation greatly, but more guests were passing up to the dressing-room, and the delightful little interview must soon be disturbed. To descend the stairs with the Celebrity in tow was a triumph not to be jeopardized. Her smile kindly promised to shelter the shyness of the two young men under her wing.

" Shall we go down, messieurs? "

Denys, afraid to invite too continuous a scrutiny, was about to offer excuses, when suddenly the tenor, with his deepest, most foreign bow, offered the lady his arm.

" Your mother has made a ten-strike," Denys confided to Miss Hammond, as intimately as if they had not just been at daggers drawn. " I never saw him so polite before."

" Is he as spoiled as all the rest of them? "

" He is n't spoiled at all. On the contrary, compliments make him dreadfully embarrassed and unhappy."

" Perhaps he thought that mother was sincere."

" Dear Miss Hammond, it 's the sincerity that makes the weariness of it."

" Yes, it must seem a sad lot to a man to fascinate every woman he meets."

" Oh, one must pay for eminence! Emperors risk assassination. Maurus risks being killed by kindness."

" At least, he won't risk being wearied by me."

She had not been disagreeable for several minutes, and her beauty was a keen delight to him. He answered warmly, " As if any man could be wearied by you, Miss Hammond!"

She stopped,—they were just at the drawing-room door and the butler had cried their names into the room,—the color rising in her cheeks, her eyes, which he had decided were hazel, a clear black. She looked a different and a younger girl.

" How could you think I meant that? How could you suppose I was bragging? I meant that I should n't force my admiration on him."

" Of course not," Denys answered absently, noting how handsome she looked when angry. " I am afraid we are blocking the doorway, Miss Hammond. Shall we go in? "

Nothing could have been better timed for Mrs. Hammond than her daughter's unexpected pause. Sweeping into the room on Maurice's arm, the ever-watchful Argus no-

where to be seen, appearances certainly justified her proud, proprietary air. Margery did not conceal her stupefaction, and Mrs. Fanning asked involuntarily:

"But how long have you known Monsieur Tolna?"

It was an unhandsome question, especially with Mrs. Burnham standing by. For that lady's grievance against the Fannings had quite vanished when she was asked to receive with them on this unique occasion. As Mrs. Hammond hesitated, Maurice answered for her.

"We are very old friends, Madame Hammond and I. In fact, so old, that I feared to find myself forgotten."

Given a lead over, Mrs. Hammond did not lack courage for the fence.

"Oh, not at all, monsieur. How could I forget? He is n't changed a bit, Mrs. Fanning, for all his fame. He is just the same simple, unspoiled boy that he used to be."

"Hard lines for you, Alice, that she knows Monsieur Tolna so well," smiled Mrs. Burnham, with her cheerful habit of putting into words what everybody else might think but nobody else would say. "You were crowing, you and Madge, over being the first

white women to shake hands with him. Rather spoils the fun, does n't it, to find that Mrs. Hammond knew him in knickerbockers? "

If Margery's fun was spoiled, no one was the wiser.

" But no," she answered quickly, " we congratulate ourselves that it is in our house Monsieur Tolna meets an old friend. How do you do, Miss Hammond? "

The two girls looked at each other, each a little taken aback. They were dressed in precisely the same shade of yellow.

" How clinkin' you look! Honor," Mrs. Burnham cried. " But then you 'd look clinkin' in a potato-sack. On my word, your dress and Margy's are cut off the same piece. I say, Madge, are n't the Hammond family playing trumps to-night? "

Annoying as it was to Margery,—it would, she felt, have exasperated any girl living to see the effect of her carefully studied gown spoiled by the appearance of its double on a more beautiful wearer,—it was far more annoying that Mrs. Burnham should remark on her discomposure. Suddenly she perceived that Miss Hammond, far from triumphing, was more confused than herself. Her

haughty head was drooping, her cold cheeks were aflame. Margery rose to the occasion.

"I am so pleased to find my taste confirmed by Miss Hammond's," she answered, without perceptible pause. "Otway scoffed at me; she said that nobody was wearing yellow this winter. Miss Hammond, you must stand here and receive with us. Everybody will think we arranged our frocks on purpose for that."

Honor, neither speaking nor moving, looked at her, wide-eyed.

"Oh, yes, you must." Margery caught her hand and drew her into the line with Mrs. Fanning and Mrs. Burnham.

As Mrs. Hammond claimed a word with her daughter, the singer bent over Margery to say in French, "Mademoiselle, how that was prettily done of you!"

"Why, did you understand what was said?"

"The dumb-show," he protested. "That something was said to embarrass Mademoiselle Hammond, and that you saved the situation. I thank you."

"*You* thank me?" she repeated with meaning, but the confusion she expected did not follow. Meeting her look, his smiling eyes seemed to say: "I see that you observe my

warm interest in this young lady. Yes, I am interested in her, and I am not in the least embarrassed about it." The eyes seemed to claim her sympathy so confidently that Margery found herself giving him an answering smile of perfect understanding. Then she turned, to draw Honor into their conversation. She had never particularly liked the girl. No one particularly liked Miss Hammond. But now, all in a moment, Margery was her ardent champion. Undaunted by the beauty's extreme apathy concerning the Celebrity, Margery beamed encouragement upon him and chatted for all three.

"Maurus," Denys broke in, with an abruptness positively rude, "I particularly want to present you to Mrs. Norton Burnham."

"Oh, do you feel that you have to, Mr. Alden?" that irrepressible lady inquired. "Could n't you leave me out in the cold again? You see, you 've explained, already, that he 's a hermit, never meets people—only two or three hundred of Alice's friends, at a scratch party, with only a day's notice, just because she wants to show him off. Oh, well, if you insist on my knowing him—Monsieur Tolna, je suis charmée de vous voir. Je vous dit droit maintenant que je parle Français

comme le diable, mais si vous êtes très intelligent, peut-être vous me suiverez. Les langues ne sont pas mon couleur long."

" Long color? " Maurice meditated. " Oh, long suit. Well, if I can't match you at this kind of French, my lady, at any rate I 'll be an easy second."

" Oh, madame, je suis Hongrois. Je parle Français comme trentes centimes. Je gage que votre Français peut donner au mien des cartes et des piques."

She looked blank, not recognizing the Jessie Burnham idiom in a Hungarian mouth.

" C'est Grecque à moi, mais n'importe. Le point, monsieur, est ceci: Voulez-vous avoir le bonté d'attendre—d'assister, je veux dire—chez Monsieur Willoughby Smith, le vingt-huitième Février, à neuf heures? C'est son Sing Sing dîner."

" After all," again meditated her interlocutor, " I seem to be behind on the slang of the day. Mais, madame, vous-êtes trop nombreuse pour moi. Quoi, par la Grande Cuillère de Corne, veut dire un Sing Sing dîner? "

" Oh, autrefois il n'y avait jamais un tel," Mrs. Nortie bubbled with joy. " Le dîner de Willie sera absolument le premier—absolument unique, en effet." She showed a guile-

less pleasure at the truly French sound of this sentence. "Il faut que vous vous habilez comme un prisonnier."

"L'Homme au Masque de Fer, ou Monsieur Bonnivard?"

"Oh, non, non, pas du tout. Mais en vérité cela serait un bon stunt, monsieur. Prisonniers fameux de tous les siècles—par exemple, Jonah dans l'estomac de la baleine! Merci bien pour la suggestion!—Chez Monsieur Smith, il fait qu'on se habillera comme un forçat, à raies, et qu'on s'exercera le pas de l'oie. Comprenez-vous?"

"C'est clair comme le boue. Comme je trouve beau, madame, la mode intrepide dont vous maniez sans gants la langue Française."

"Je crois que vous me tirez la jambe," Mrs. Norton responded, quite without offense. "Tenez, dîtes-moi si vous viendriez dîner avec Monsieur Smith?"

"Est-ce qu'un canard nagera?"

Mrs. Nortie smiled comprehension of his tone at least.

"Vous viendriez?"

"Mais oui, sur et certain."

"Bon ouvrage," she said heartily, giving him a grip of her firm, square hand. "Mr. Alden, I 've trapped your shy bird. He 's

promised, on his sacred honor, to come to Willie's dinner."

Denys bestowed on her a kindly, troubled smile.

"Then I sincerely hope that he will."

"What do you mean?"

"Only that years of familiarity with the artistic temperament make me reluctant to predict what Maurus will or will not do."

"You mean he won't come? After promising me?"

Denys smiled. "Ah, I decline to prophesy about the artistic temperament. You can't even depend on their breaking their promises."

Mrs. Nortie wheeled on Maurice. "Monsieur, il dit que vous me vendez une brique d'or. Il dit que vous-êtes menteur et manqueur de promesses. Mais je ne le crois pas."

"Et je dit à mon tour qu'il est vilain et taquin."

She looked steadily at Maurice, her blue eyes, so pretty and so shallow, quite grave with anxiety. "Je vous crois," she said with emphasis, and turned on her persecutor. "Look here, Denys Alden, this is the second time you 've tried to put a spoke in my wheel. The other night there was n't an earthly rea-

son why you should n't have taken me behind the scenes. I thought so at the time, and now I know it. Well, I let it go; life 's too short to quarrel. I like peace, but I don't like to lie down and be trampled on. What you 've got against me I can't imagine. I 've always asked you to my house. If I 've ever been rude, I don't know it. But you spoiled my fun that night, and now you 're trying it again. I 'm not a little nobody. If you mean to sauce me, my dear sir, you 'd better believe I 'll get back at you."

" I can't think how you so misunderstand me, Mrs. Burnham. I was only trying to save you a possible disappointment."

" Oh, you make me tired! " she cried.

" Cheer up, I 'm going. I want to present Maurus to Mrs. Westerly."

Mrs. Westerly being Mrs. Burnham's especial rival, a horrible vision flashed upon her of the wicked Alden haling Tolna to a Westerly dinner at least a week before Willie Smith's. She saw that she should have asked Tolna to dine at her own house at once. But she had not one free evening for a fortnight. Well, some date must be "chucked up." Whether to throw over the Sydney Wallaces or the Armstrongs—but here she suddenly

woke to the fact that the two men were leaving her.

"Au plaisir de vous revoir, madame," Maurice called over his shoulder as Denys piloted him down the room. Opportunity had passed by with forelock all unclutched.

Willie Smith hurried up to her with anxious brow and voice. "Well, I saw you talking to Tolna. Got him?"

"I don't know whether I 've got him or not," Mrs. Burnham returned, candidly and crossly. A laugh from Mrs. Westerly, which she fancied to be at her expense, inspired her further remark, "I 'm getting pretty sick, Willie, of being your chief steward."

"What do you mean? Don't you want to help me with my dinner?" cried the anxious Willie.

"Upon my word, I don't just see why I should. I 've slaved and slaved over your shows. If any little detail goes wrong, people say it 's all my fault. My lack of tact, I suppose. That 's what they 're always exclaiming about me,—no tact. But if it goes right, it 's Willoughby Smith's success."

"But everybody knows that you pull it off. And you enjoy doing it. You said Burnham

would n't let you give that kind of show. He is n't up to date—"

"He 'll give any kind of show I please, if he has n't much use for the little fool performances that amuse you."

Willie Smith's cheek, leathery from much automobiling, showed a tinge of red through the tan.

"Well, I 'm glad to hear your real opinion of my dinner. I 'll try and relieve you, Mrs. Burnham, from the duties of hostess."

She was cross enough to enjoy his ill-temper. "I hope you will, I 'm sure," she answered.

Mr. Smith watched her a moment, then walked straight to the door of the music-room, where Madame Arnheim was singing the "Jewel Song." Miss Hammond, released from the receiving party, stood there by her mother.

"You don't care anything about this, do you?" Willie said in Honor's ear. "Mrs. Fanning has got some orchids worth looking at."

"Go, dear; you 'll enjoy it." Mrs. Hammond smiled benignly on the pair. "My daughter is a devoted botanist, Mr. Smith. She studied in Paris under Lasalle."

Characteristically, Honor had not spoken at all. Her unmoved face showed no preference for going or staying. Her mother, sitting down in the only unoccupied chair, abandoned her to Willie Smith.

"Those children have gone to look at Mrs. Fanning's orchids," she informed the lady next to her, whose daughter had not just been spoken to by the most eligible bachelor in New York. "Honor has a perfect passion for flowers. No mere sentimental admiration for them, but a deep scientific knowledge of the subject. She was Lasalle's favorite pupil. Mr. Smith is so interested in the culture of flowers. They have so much in common." A wary glance out of the corner of her eye showed her the man and the maid walking away together. She settled back luxuriously in her chair. "Is n't Arnheim superb? I simply drink in every note. I only hope the people here to-night are capable of appreciating her."

"They 're orchids I gave to Mrs. Burnham," Willie was explaining to Honor. "She had more than she wanted, so she handed some over to Mrs. Fanning. I got 'em from a fellow that had been exploring Central America. He was pretty well on his uppers

when I helped him out. Clever chap, you know. Scientific. But he never 'll make money. So he 's going to name the white one for me. Going to read a paper at the Natural History Museum, and tell 'em about it."

"They 're very fine, I suppose," Miss Hammond said. "I don't care for flowers."

"Well, I don't care for orchids myself. There 's no odor, and you can't make any show with 'em. Bank a hundred, and it looks like six. But I like to own things just because they 're rare, and I 've got an idea that I 'll have every American tropical flower represented in my conservatory. There 's a bully big one in my new house, and I thought I should like to treat it differently from the common run. How does it strike you?"

"It would n't be any more tiresome than most conservatories."

After puzzling over this remark, he decided that it was a joke.

"Then I 'll do it if you say so."

She glanced at him with that sudden darkening of her eyes that betokened interest or excitement. Something in his voice— But she told herself she was absurd.

"How do you like your new house?" she said, in her dead voice.

"First-rate. At least, I shall when I am settled. The workmen are n't out yet, but I knew they never would be if I did n't move in. I want you and your mother to see that house, Miss Hammond. Won't you come some day soon, and have tea on a trestle?"

"You are always so original in your entertainments," she said.

"Let 's sit down a minute," he suggested, with portentous gravity.

No one else had deserted Arnheim; the conservatory was theirs. Honor sat down on a wicker bench, where a frond of fern brushed her forehead, and thought how pleasant the wet touch felt, the while she listened to Mr. Smith's next words.

"Won't you let me put the deeds of that house in your name?" He was close to her on the bench; instinctively she drew away.

"But—but you don't know me."

"I 've followed you round everywhere for a year. You must have seen what I meant. You don't know how I admire you. It is not your looks, though a man would be blind that would n't see them. It 's your manner. You behave like a queen. You don't jolly people

or let them get fresh with you. People are afraid of you. I give 'little fool' entertainments, and you may think I don't appreciate dignity. But I do. It 's the real thing. I want my wife to be a queen."

Miss Hammond was struggling with a hysterical desire to laugh.

"Then you don't want me to come to your Sing Sing dinner in stripes?"

His brow wrinkled with apology. "I don't want you to come at all. I did n't invite you, because the others were n't your crowd. I did n't think you 'd enjoy it. They 're rowdy, that 's what they are—rowdy. I 'm going to shake 'em, if you 'll have me. You won't be bothered by any Sing Sing dinners or Chuck Connors balls. It 's silly, and I 'm done with it."

From her retreat at the far end of the bench, she surveyed him critically, reflecting that she was at least four inches taller than he. In appearance he was certainly insignificant. Of his mind she knew little, save the report that he managed well the great fortune his father had made for him. Of his ideals and aims she had learned more in the last five minutes than in a year of meeting him at dinners and dances, where he had been merely one of

the well-dressed supernumeraries who completed the stage-picture of society. She could never have guessed that he would promote himself to a speaking part. Absorbed in contemplation of him in his new aspect of human being, she forgot her cue to speak.

"Are n't you going to answer me?"

"Oh, did n't I?" She still fought an impulse to laugh. "It is 'yes,' Mr. Smith."

She rose as she spoke, with some vague idea of escaping a caress. If she stood, he could hardly kiss her without permission.

"That 's splendid!" he cried, quite content. "I 'm delighted. Shall we go in and announce it?"

"To mother?"

"To everybody. Half the people we know are here. Would n't this be a good time?"

"But my mother must know first, and my father, who is n't here to-night. Then my mother will announce it in her own way, to her own friends."

"Yes, you 're right," he assented, with visible chagrin. "It would n't be the correct thing to announce it here. I want to do just what you tell me. Say, are you going to the Anderson ball?"

"Yes, we were going—"

"I 'm not asked, but if we announce the engagement before then, I could go with you, could n't I?"

"Oh, there 'll be plenty of chances for you to meet Mrs. Anderson," Honor cried. Her fiancé slightly misread her emphasis.

"Yes, I knew you 'd fix that for me. Say, is there any particular stone you prefer?"

"Any stone?"

"For the ring, I mean."

"I have n't thought about it."

"Because, if you 'd like it, I want to give you the Rajah's Rose."

"The what?"

"It 's the third largest pigeon's-blood ruby in the world; the largest in a private collection. I always meant it for my wife."

"I shall like it very much."

"I 'll bring it round right after breakfast. You 'll wear it right away, won't you? I wish we could announce the engagement to-morrow. I 'm so proud of it, I want every one to know."

"Oh, I 'm not half as nice as you think me. I am very disagreeable. I don't make friends. But I will try to be different. I will try to make other people think as well of me as you do."

"But that 's just what I like you for," Smith explained. "Because you 're not hail-fellow-well-met with Tom, Dick, and Harry. All these other girls are trying to butt in with everybody. But you act as if all creation was n't good enough to make you look round. That 's what I admire you for."

CHAPTER V

MR. ALDEN IS NOT ALTOGETHER PLEASED

FOR Denys the evening did not begin till that late hour when, all the guests having arrived, and the concert being well under way, he received Mrs. Fanning's permission to take Margery into the deserted library for a little rest before her part of the program.

"Do open the window a moment; I need oxygen," the girl bade. "Oh, Mr. Alden, don't you think I would better jump out on those inhospitable flag-stones?"

"You poor child! Are you so tired?"

She sank back into an easy-chair with a deep sigh.

"Yes, tired; but worse—scared. In what moment of folly did I undertake to play to-night?"

"It is too much to stand up shaking hands for two hours, and then play," Denys asserted, in deep concern. "May n't I get you some wine, or something?"

"Oh, no; it is n't that sort of collapse. I am simply overcome with a sense of my own conceit in attempting to play Hungarian airs before Monsieur Tolna. What an imbecile!"

"But my dear—Miss Fanning," Denys protested warmly, "that 's the thing of all others to please him. Wonderful musician though he is, he does n't play himself,—or thinks he does n't,—and he loves to be played to. Of course, Hungarian airs—why, your choice was inspired!"

"But to murder his gipsy-music!" Margery cried tragically, fluttering in aimless nervousness about the room. "Of course I meant to pay him a particular compliment, but when he hears me he 'll think it a particular affront."

"My dearest girl—"

Margery paused to look about the room and then at Denys, in elaborately dramatized surprise.

"Are you soliloquizing, Mr. Alden?"

"I must have been, Miss Fanning. As you kindly point out, I could not possibly have been addressing that stately young lady, Miss Fanning. Though why, my dear Miss Fanning, I should be forced to call you Miss

Fanning, when your mother lets me call her Aunt—"

"You have known my mother—how many years? You two had an old friendship when you first met me. We began at the beginning."

"May I hope to have the honor of winning your—friendship?"

"It is not hard to win, Mr. Alden; but neither is it to be taken for granted. I do like you, of course," she reassured him; "but suppose I had n't? You would have *begun* by calling me Margery."

"Is that libellous?"

"Worse—*lèse-majesté.*"

It was always delightful to Denys to see Margery unbend from icy dignity to a jest. He loved her very scorn and floutings for the sake of that moment when the twinkle of fun danced into her violet eyes and, for no discernible reason, her whole mood changed. Though her transparency often made her mother uncomfortable, Margery regarded herself as a paragon of artfulness. Nor could her lover, with his merely masculine perceptions, ever understand why he was alternately welcomed as Denys and repelled as Mr. Alden. Her real sentiments were a riddle to

him. He only knew that she had frowned and now she smiled. And he basked contented in the smile.

"But my dear—Miss Fanning, I don't want to call you Margery. I want to call you— Well, never mind. But I see that I must tell you again what I 've told you before —that you have real musical genius. Therefore, of course, you play unequally. But you could n't play badly to save your life."

The girl's face was all care again.

"I can to-night. Mr. Alden, honestly, I feel as if I 'd rather jump out on those stones than get up on that platform."

"Good! Your type will always do its best just after it threatens its worst."

"Oh, I am going to play. I won't be a coward. But poor Monsieur Tolna will suffer tortures."

"Poor Monsieur Tolna will have the greatest pleasure that has fallen to him since he crossed the ocean."

Her face softened again, her eyes grew dreamy.

"Mr. Alden, if I could give him pleasure! That is my only justification. I thought of how much pleasure he scatters right and left, of how much happiness he has

given me, and I wanted to do something just for him. I ought to have known I could n't."

"You can."

"No, I am like Icarus: I attempt too fine a flight." She was silent a moment, to continue in another voice, half dreamy, half eager: "And yet, what a chance to do what nobody ever dreamed I could! Tolna! Not only the prince of artists, but the prince of men. The beauty of his voice and the beauty of his life! His talents, and the consecration of them to liberty and justice. Denys, a clod ought to break into music before Tolna. A musician might be happy to play for him, and die!"

She was speaking to herself rather than to him, in an enthusiasm too absorbing for any self-consciousness. Theoretically, Denys knew that he should have been delighted at this high tribute to the success of his invention. Actually, he felt, for the first time, qualms of conscience and almost of regret. That the dear public should accept an imaginary being was an exquisite jest. That Margery should be deceived suddenly revolted him. He said to himself that when he built up the Tolna myth, he had not expected her to take it so seriously. It would have been truer to admit that he had not then expected to take her so seriously.

While he pondered in silence this new aspect of his perfidy, she spoke again, more quietly, somewhat chilled by his strange unresponsiveness.

"Do I rhapsodize? But you, of all men, ought to understand. For I know of your Tolna only what you have told me, admire what you have showed me to admire. He is the only man I ever saw who was somehow apart from the hurly-burly, the common frets of life. All the rest of us live for the little incidents of a day, but he lives for a principle. One feels as if he were truth and justice and high ideals personified."

Denys began to be frightened. Visions of a dreadful possibility put an edge to his tongue.

"A sort of walking allegory? After all, Miss Fanning, you must remember that he is not an apotheosis. He is just a man."

For an instant she was amazed that he could speak thus of the idol whose worship she had learned from him. Then she thought she understood, and her eyes danced.

"Yes, I am glad to remember that.—Here is Hyacinth to say that they are ready for our number. Can you believe that she is really Jessie Burnham's sister?"

The appearance of Miss Hyacinth Lawrence, who had long since renounced the unsymbolic name of Ellen, given her by her sponsors in baptism, was not an interruption to be overlooked. Her red hair was dressed à la Pompadour, in a manner to amaze King Louis's fair friend. Mounting from her eyebrows, it rolled up to skyey regions. Flame-colored masses concealed her ears. More flame-colored masses fell into a huge loose knot between her shoulders. Her dress was of black crêpe, its short waist and clinging skirt First-Empire-Greek, while Early-Italian winged sleeves trailed on the floor, even when the lady was standing. Her ornaments were a scarab ring and a necklace of cinnamon-colored stones, recognized by the learned as hyacinths. Her large eyes were tragic in their intensity, her voice was rich, her speech slow and cadenced almost as if she intoned.

"Darling, Herr Hoffmann has almost finished. Do you feel the influences to be right?"

Margery answered with a smile and a cock of the head more for Denys than for Hyacinth.

"There is only one influence, and that is

perfect. I am going to make you all thrill to-night—I 'm going to play for Tolna."

A note in her voice thrilled them, now, with confidence in her success. The man, ashamed of himself, felt his heart grow heavy.

" Darling," Miss Hyacinth resumed (there was to Denys something out of joint in a world where Hyacinth, and not he, might so address Margery) —" darling, let me put my ring on your finger. It is an amulet. Wearing it, you can't fail."

" Keep it for yourself, dear. In the bright lexicon of Margery—" that young lady gaily defied the fates. " Wait for me, Hyacinth, till I get my fiddle. Mr. Alden, Hyacinth is a better musician than I am. You can talk shop to her."

Despite his always careful courtesy, Denys's perturbation tied his tongue. Quite unembarrassed by the silence, Miss Lawrence stood still as a statue, her eyes fixed on vacancy. When at last she spoke, it was in faultless German.

" I wish from my soul that I could speak the tongue of Hungary. Only by knowing the language like one's own, the people like one's neighbors, can one interpret a nation's music. To play for Monsieur Tolna—"

Denys was not in the mood for more rhapsodies about his Frankenstein's monster.

"You are not consistent, Miss Lawrence," —he tried to touch a lighter key. "You are speaking German, but don't tell me that frock owes its being to the Kaiserin's modiste."

Hyacinth glanced over her costume with some complacency.

"No; it was put together in Paris. But the design, Mr. Alden, is entirely my own."

"So I should have guessed. Then, Miss Lawrence, why not the language of Doucet—and Maeterlinck?"

"Maeterlinck?" Miss Lawrence repeated vaguely, as if the name hardly conveyed a meaning to her. "That was last winter."

"And now he has gone with the snows and the sleeves of yester-year?"

Her gravity was impenetrable.

"I have the Vedas now on my night-stand. They are an ever-present help when one suffers."

Denys regarded her with sad surprise. "Miss Lawrence, I am disappointed. That is not worthy of you."

She straightened, her green eyes blazing.

"Mr. Alden, I am most disappointed in you. Are you so ignorant, so Philistine, that

you despise the great books of the East because, forsooth, you are pleased to call them heathen?"

Denys's face shone with mischief. "Pardon! You misunderstand," he pleaded in his most innocent manner. "I never employ the cant word 'heathen.' Why should enlightened minds attach more sacredness to the Hebrew prophets than to Buddha? Both interest the judicial scholar. But even if I discriminated between them, never could I assail the cherished beliefs of a devout agnostic."

"I was sure you were n't a Philistine. But, then, why are you disappointed in me?"

"That you look for help when you suffer. How, except by suffering, can one's soul be liberated?"

She pondered this question, holding Denys's solemn gaze.

"Ah, you, too, believe that one should court suffering?"

"One should seek it out, plunge one's self on its cruel bosom, as Arnold von Winkelried on the German spears."

"Suppose," said Margery from the doorway, "we plunge ourselves on the cruel criticism of the audience?"

"I must show the men how to turn the

piano," Hyacinth exclaimed, a sudden swoop from the infinite to the practical carrying her swiftly down the passage.

" How insufferable of you to guy her so," Miss Fanning reproached him.

" I do it for her own good. It is my conviction that that girl is n't half such a fool as she acts. It is the ambition of my life to break up her gravity. I have vowed a vow to out-nonsense her own nonsense till I disgust her into sense."

" You 'll stop scoffing when you hear her play. She is great," Margery cried, with an intense look borrowed from Hyacinth. " Wait till we show you what we can do for Monsieur Tolna."

With an anxious heart under his immaculate shirt-front, Denys went to seek the singer, who, like a good child, was just where he had been left, exchanging labored German sentences with Judge Foster.

" Will you not give me the benefit of your intimate knowledge of the Magyar people, Monsieur Tolna?" inquired that eminent publicist. " What, in your judgment, is the real sentiment of the dwellers in the remotest provinces toward the existing Austrian headship?"

"It is high time to interfere," thought Denys, maker of pedigrees, as he courteously apologized for bearing his friend away. "But I owe you the real apology, Maurice," he added, piloting the singer out of the drawing-room and down a little empty passage, "for leaving you stranded with that old bore."

"He was n't a bore at all, Denys. He is a most well-informed, high-minded old gentleman, anxious to pay homage to the glories of my country. If I were the real thing, and not a pretending ass, I should fall on his neck."

"While, as it is, your conscience mows at you because, for the best of reasons, I have been forced to edit your early biography," Denys jeered, all the more sharply that his own conscience "mowed," as he said. "Sonny, you disgust me. You are losing your sense of humor."

Opening a narrow door, he signed Maurice through. They found themselves in the crowded music-room, in the space between the platform and the first row of chairs. The private door being concealed in the wall-paneling, their sudden conspicuousness was so startling that all eyes turned on them. Denys, blandly unconscious, looked only at the embowered platform, where Margery stood

waiting, violin on shoulder, while Hyacinth trailed her sable skirts up the steps. "Maurus," he said, quite audibly to those nearest, "I must present you to Miss Lawrence."

But Hyacinth had taken her seat, and Denys dropped back, with a gesture of apology.

"Too late. We must not move now; they are beginning."

He looked quite properly mortified that they had obtruded themselves at the wrong moment, while he felt a boyish delight at the success of the ruse which, apparently without premeditation, had made his Adonis the observed of all observers. The situation was further embellished by Maurice's beautiful unconsciousness both of the manœuver and of the audience. For him, nothing seemed to exist but the music. The exalted Tolna of Denys's imagination could have behaved no better.

And now the rustling and whispering guests fell silent as the wild dance-measures filled the room. Somber piano and fantastic violin were one. To the listeners came unfamiliar visions—of moonlight shimmering on forest pools; of vast starry spaces; of wait-

ing plains and beckoning hills, where life meant living—a sense of self outpassed; of love counting the world well lost; of rapture trembling into pain unbearable; and, beating through all, revealing all, the merciless gaiety of the air. Tears dimmed the eyes of the younger women. Stout matrons straightened their burdened shoulders, following with their fans the sweep of the melody. Weary men of business picked up a sudden courage for to-morrow's struggle. Even old Colonel Clay, reputed never to be wholly awake except at meals or cards, nodded his blond head in time, his far-away gaze fixed on the Christmas dances in the gallery of the " big house " in Carolina, long ago.

On the final notes there followed such a storm of applause as is seldom heard from the sleek and sleepy after-dinner audience, too comfortably settled in the music-rooms of the rich. The girls came forward, Hyacinth still in Hungary, Margery's brilliant face turned on Tolna. Eyebrows lifted, her eyes asked the question which his smile answered as he led the clapping. Then, as if the permission of the Master had been sought and given, she accepted her tribute by curtsey after curtsey.

It was the second silent understanding that

Denys had noted between the two. As a discreet stage-manager, much too wise to overdo an effect, he had intended, as soon as the Hungarian number was over, to return Tolna to obscurity. But now his craft was forgotten as he became the prey of his own forebodings. At his side stood Maurice, equally still and absorbed. Looking over the audience in a pause of the music, he had discovered Honor Hammond. She, seated between her mother and her fiancé, was no more conscious of the singer's eyes upon her than was he of the hundreds of eyes upon him. But more than one of her neighbors followed that strange gaze direct to her face.

It was, of course, Mrs. Burnham who spoke.

"Honor, you 've made a conquest. Tolna has looked at you without moving a muscle for seventeen minutes."

Honor glanced up. With a murmured "Pardon!" as if she could hear it, Maurice dropped his eyes to the floor and kept them there.

"If he must n't look at you, he won't look at anybody," Mrs. Nortie commented. "He 'll keep your image undisturbed."

Without waiting for a reply, and without a

suspicion that Willie Smith's baleful glare reflected proprietary rights, she hastened to make peace with that scowling young gentleman. "If he 's still angry with me, he has n't found any one to fill my place," she meditated, comfortably. "Willie," she called, "I 'll play. It 's all right about the twenty-eighth."

Willie answered with equal distinctness:

"There ain't going to be any core to this apple."

"What do you mean?"

"Dinner 's off."

Turning his shoulders ostentatiously upon her, he plunged into conversation with Miss Hammond. Mrs. Burnham felt her world crashing about her ears. But no one could have guessed it from the gay impertinence of her reply:

"You 're cutting a wide swath, to-night, Honor. Which of 'em is it, Beauty or the Beast?"

For Denys the best efforts of the famous Gerausch, of the divine Arnheim, had no charm. He could not have told what they were singing, but he knew that they were an unconscionable time about it. He wanted to get Maurice away, but reinforcements of un-

interesting persons kept coming up to take possession of him. Finally, in spite of his intention, he and his charge still lingered when the half-dozen long-delaying, intimate friends grouped themselves, among scattered programs and folded camp-chairs, to talk the evening over. While his eyes followed Maurice and Margery into the recess of the bay-window, he yet heard an automatic tongue—possibly his own—saying:

"You see, Tolna had n't heard those airs since he fled from Tolna Castle. I have told you how his father was assassinated by Austrian agents. Though it can't be proved, of course, there is no doubt in the world that the Emperor was privy to the murder. The only warning that the count had was brought to him, at the risk of his own life, by a blind fiddler playing under the window. He was brave to rashness, like his son after him, and he chose to defy the warning. Well, the boy tells me that that mazurka of Miss Fanning's was the very air the beggar played that night; and he, a little toddler, was held up in his mother's arms to see the queer fiddler. You may imagine what memories she has quickened."

"They are talking like old friends," Mrs.

Fanning smiled, meaning to please him. Denys jumped up and strode across the room to claim Maurice.

" Mademoiselle," the singer had been saying in his Englishy French, " you do not want my poor compliment. It is your reward to *know* how well you played. You saw how you held the room."

She smiled up at him.

" I am a fraud, monsieur. To-night I played much better than I can."

Again each felt that mutual understanding which the length of their acquaintance certainly did not warrant.

"Because you are happy?" Maurice said, and she nodded.

" Yes, that is why."

The words were hardly spoken when the intimacy that they implied struck her with surprise.

" Monsieur Tolna, you are very different from my thought of you."

His knowledge made him smile.

" How, mademoiselle? "

" Monsieur, I fancied you—how shall I say?—somewhat austere. I knew the motive of your life—"

The Hungarian patriot looked like a chick-

en-thief. In a voice stern from embarrassment, "Please never speak of that," he bade.

Margery flushed at the sudden sharpness of his tone.

"Oh, I beg your pardon! I should have known that there are some subjects too sacred for a stranger— Oh, I am distressed!"

He writhed the more.

"It is nothing, mademoiselle. Pray forget it. Never speak of it again."

"Ah, monsieur, I was right, at first, to think you austere."

At this Maurice was forced to laugh.

"A thousand pardons, mademoiselle. Speak of anything in the world you please."

This somewhat sweeping permission Denys was in time to overhear. Rather in the manner of a schoolmaster to a naughty child, he ordered Tolna to make his adieux to Mrs. Fanning. Margery could not be blind to the rudeness, but all she said was:

"Oh, Mr. Alden, I have never met anybody like Monsieur Tolna. I thought that he would be remote, cold; but, instead, he is so human, so sympathetic. He is wonderful. One feels that though one admires him as a star, one might make him a friend. Oh, he is perfection! That is the only thing to say."

CHAPTER VI

A BETROTHAL À LA MODE

THE carriage door was barely shut before Mrs. Hammond turned to Honor.

"I have never seen Willoughby Smith so single out a girl."

"You make me think of Mrs. Bennet, mother."

"Mrs. Bennet?" her mother repeated, wondering whether Mrs. Bennet's daughter was a favorite of Willoughby Smith.

"In 'Pride and Prejudice.'"

Mrs. Hammond remembered enough of her Jane Austen to recognize this comparison as most impertinent and offensive.

"I suppose you mean deliberately to be rude, Honor. You usually do."

"Yes, I am horrid," the girl admitted, without penitence, but without defiance, as one who mentions an irremediable fact. "Don't let us quarrel to-night, though, mother. I have been a good girl for once. I have accepted Willoughby Smith."

"Honor!" Mrs. Hammond cried in an awful voice—a voice that said "if this *were* a joke—"

"It is true. He asked me, when we went into the conservatory. He said he wanted to forsake all his Sing Sing dinner companions and cleave only to me. He is coming round, to-morrow morning, to see you and father and bring me the ring."

"Honor!" Mrs. Hammond cried again, brokenly.

"I think he means business," Honor's level voice went on. "He seemed to be in earnest —and he was perfectly sober. I don't see that he can get away now. Why, *mother!*"

Mrs. Hammond, burying her face in her chiffon muff, had burst into a tempest of tears.

Honor looked almost as stupefied as her mother had looked a moment ago. She said nothing for a while, evidently expecting the sobs to cease. Finally she asked with embarrassment:

"Mother, are n't you pleased?"

The tears rained on, and Honor found herself thinking, "Mother must be upset, or she would never ruin her party muff." Suddenly, with an impulse that surprised herself,

she flung her arm round her mother and drew down the wet face to her shoulder. Mrs. Hammond caught her daughter in both arms to lavish kisses on her cheek.

"Honor, my dear, dear girl! I am so happy!"

Almost against her will the "dear girl" felt her own tears rise. Her chief emotion was bewilderment.

"It is what I hoped for, and longed for, and prayed for," Mrs. Hammond said in a fervent voice. "It is what I brought you up for. But I have thought that you would miss it."

"So have I," Honor answered, cold again.

"Your father never was in sympathy with me about your education. He wanted you to go to school here. But I saw, ten years ago, what you would be. I knew that you could have the most brilliant life, and I made up my mind to fit you for it. I don't care what Edgar says, you can't get the *cachet* here."

"Then you brought me back with the *cachet,* and nobody seemed to like the brand."

"Nobody is good enough for you!" Mrs. Hammond cried hotly. "When I look over the men we meet, I could cry to think that any one of them should have my beautiful

daughter. I wanted a reigning prince for you. It was hard to confess to myself that that was beyond you. But Willoughby Smith can give you a princess's position."

"It is good to accomplish the end you were made for," the girl reflected aloud. "I suppose Lou Dillon feels the same way."

"Lou Dillon? Who is she?"

"The queen of the trotting-track."

"The queen—oh, a horse! I must say, Honor, I think that 's very coarse."

"I know I 'm disagreeable, mother dear. I always am—everybody says so. But truly, I am very happy that you are pleased."

The ready tears gushed again.

"My dear, I hope and know that you 'll be very, very happy."

The carriage stopped. Honor opened the door herself, for the Hammonds, unlike most of their acquaintances, kept but one man for their modest brougham.

"There is a light in the work-room. If you don't mind, mother, I 'd like to tell father myself."

A glance at her tear-stained face in the hall mirror procured Mrs. Hammond's acquiescence. Usually she did not approve of family conclaves behind her back.

While her mother climbed the stairs, Honor waited below to put out the gas. She was not anxious to hear further rejoicings, but Mrs. Hammond waylaid her in the upper hall.

"My dear, dear child, I am so happy!"

"I am glad, mother, that you 're pleased."

The deadness of the girl's voice, heard for the thousandth time, struck Mrs. Hammond's ear for the first time.

"Why, Honor, are n't *you* pleased?"

Her daughter spoke with quiet force.

"Indeed I am. I am very happy to have my own home."

"For whom has this house been conducted, if not for you?"

"I did n't mean that, mother. I know that you have done everything for me. I only meant—I shall like my married dignity."

"And it is a dignity worthy of you, thank God! You don't know how happy you have made me, my dearest. You can't appreciate a mother's feelings till you are a mother yourself."

"I wonder if that is true," the girl said, climbing the next flight without a good-night.

THE Hammond house stood in Ninth Street, a red brick, iron-railinged, green-doored sur-

vival of the 'fifties. Mrs. Hammond, born Van Winkle, stuck to the Washington Square neighborhood and claimed for herself a leadership in that shadowy body, the Knickerbocker set. Only the newest comers of the other set—the set that really matters—felt any awe of pedigree, but all of them considered it a sign of good-breeding to assume a little. On the whole, the meerschaumed ancestors were a valuable asset, and so were the lady's literary affiliations and her husband's artistic ones. Society was rather proud of her cleverness, and glad to meet in her pretty house the latest wandering decadent from France, or the most popular of young actresses. And when the descendant of the ancestors in turn produced a descendant so beautiful that her name became a household word wherever, from Maine to California, New York society news is telegraphed, Mrs. Hammond became a personage to be eagerly welcomed at all sorts of expensive entertainments, even though her hosts knew that she could never repay the obligation.

The stairs Honor climbed were painted white. White spindles supported the mahogany rail. The carpet was colonial blue, the wall-paper colonial buff, thickly hung with

good old prints and etchings. The whole interior was charming in its quiet good taste, its air of old-fashioned simplicity.

"Mrs. Burnham's house and most of the others look like hotels," Honor thought. "This looks like a home—and is n't. My new house will look the most hotel-like of all—and perhaps it will be a home."

She opened her father's door without knocking. The startled face which he turned to her showed that this unceremonious entrance was no easy, daughterly habit. She hesitated just within the threshold.

"I beg pardon. May I come in, if you are n't busy?"

"Of course you may."

Sweeping some papers out of sight, he rose to take her cloak. Hammond was a tall man, still showing where Honor got her lithe grace, her thick blonde hair. The two surveyed each other's looks with equal approval.

"What a lovely girl I have!" At her shrug he added, "I suppose they bore you, telling you that all the time."

"Yes. But I might find it more boring if they did n't. I—sit down, father, please. I have something to say to you."

He sat down beyond his drawing-table, apprehension in his eye.

"Did your mother send you up?"

"No; it is n't to say that we can't keep our position without a footman, or that mother and I must have a month at Palm Beach. It is n't money at all—or, yes, I suppose we shall want money. But it is for investment this time. I 'm to be married."

She winced to see such quick pleasure—or was it relief?—shine in her father's face. He cried at once:

"I congratulate you!"

"Thanks."

"Or shall, when you have told me the man's name. But I hardly need to know that first. I have so much confidence in your good judgment, Honor."

That was a pretty speech, she thought. She could find no fault. Yet it hurt her that he looked so pleased.

"It is Willoughby Smith."

"Willoughby Smith!"

"It 's true. I am really to marry all those millions."

He looked at her in silence awhile.

"I think I am rather overcome, pussy."

"So am I, dad. It 's dazzling."

"That 's the word—dazzling! All those millions. Is it beside the point, Honor, to ask you whether you—like—him?"

She pondered a moment, as if she had not considered this aspect of the matter.

"Yes, you see I do, because he seemed to like me, to think that everything I did was right. I should be happy to believe that he does really like me—that it was n't just because Jessie Burnham heckled him."

"Oh, there 's nothing wrong there," her father interposed quickly. "I never heard any scandal about Willoughby Smith."

"Neither have I. And what New York girls don't hear is n't worth hearing. No, Willoughby is just—silly."

That it was unbecoming to speak in this way of her future husband did not occur to her. But though the last thing he wanted was to disturb the match, her father could not refrain from saying distastefully:

"You don't mind marrying a man you think silly?"

"It does n't matter, does it? I get the position and he gets me for the position. We shall both be polite and nice to each other, because we are both pleased."

"You are honest, at any rate. I am not sure that such honesty is quite—decent."

"Mother just said I was coarse. But, after all the well-sounding humbug that you and I

listen to, I should think you would find me a relief. Ah, you don't, though. You think if a thing is n't lovely, the policy should be to say and say and *say* that it is."

"Speech was given to man to conceal his thoughts. That was in order that the world might be a bearable place to live in. Self-control is civilization's gain over the cave-dwellers."

"Then you think that if we spoke what we feel we should show ourselves just as barbarous as the cave-dwellers?"

"I am tempted to fancy that there has n't been much improvement. Let us hear what you 'd say if you spoke all you think."

"I should say—" abruptly she checked herself. Rising, she swept up and down the room, then dropped into her chair again with a half-laugh.

"No; you are right. There 's no use in saying it, now."

"Yes, say it. My daughter is such a stranger to me. Let me look into your soul, dear."

"Ah, it 's too late now," she said, with a fleeting smile. "It is like a post-mortem at whist. What is the use when the hand is played?"

Her father's voice was very serious.

"Honor, you and I have never had a good talk since you came home. We certainly never shall, after you are married and leave me. So to-night—?"

His voice was tender—it would have been easy to confess to him. But she was bringing no confessions, only accusations. His tenderness did not smooth the way for them. With a brusqueness that was embarrassment she answered:

"Very well, then. It is this. You don't like the sort of girl I am. Well, you might have made me different."

He was hurt and angered, as she had expected.

"My dear, I have as many shortcomings as most men; but if there is one duty I have tried to fulfil, it is my duty to my daughter."

"You have certainly toiled for her, father. But mother said to-night—you are so tender of appearances that I never knew it before—she said that you did n't approve of my being educated abroad."

"I felt rather strongly that you should go to school in the country in which you live. Surely you are not resenting that old prejudice of mine? I gave in."

"Yes, you gave in to mother because you

wanted peace, and because it would n't be chivalrous to deny your wife anything she had set her heart on. But if you had stuck it out where you felt you were right, mother would have respected you for it and probably loved you more. And I should have been a great deal happier."

"You think all those years abroad a mistake?"

"I think so. But I may be wrong. Perhaps the trouble is in me and the bringing up would have made no difference. But I have always thought the trouble was that I was too long away. I could n't get hold anywhere when I came back."

"Your mother had a great many good arguments—quite as good as mine. If you had been a boy I should have insisted on my way. But I thought she ought to know what was best for a girl. Besides, it seemed, as you say, unchivalrous—"

"Yes; you thought that if you could n't take the trouble to love her, you could make it up to her by giving her her own way in everything."

Mr. Hammond felt as if a ball of lightning had burst in the room.

"I have always loved your mother," he de-

fended himself, too resentful to remember to tell Honor that this was no topic for her.

"She says that yours was a frantic love-match."

"That is true."

"Is it? I did n't know—mother colors everything so. But since I can remember you have never seemed very fond of each other."

"Can you remember ever hearing us bicker? If you can, tell me. Tell me when I have failed to be kind."

"You are always kind. That is just it. I should n't mind if you threw plates at each other—and were sorry afterward."

"You *are* rather barbarous."

"Yes, I suppose it is rather barbarous, a girl saying that her parents don't love each other. But this is an hour apart, father. We have got all the decorous veils off, for once. To-morrow we shall be just as we have always been, and this shall be a dream. But to-night I 'm taking the stand in my own defense. You think it is shocking that I am marrying for money. I wonder that I can ever understand that point of view, brought up as I have been. But I do, and I say in answer that you and mother married for love."

"This is what we men call hitting below the belt, Honor. But let us have it out now."

The girl went on as if he had not spoken.

"They don't pretend in France. Here we do just as they do, but we must pretend otherwise. It makes the situation so cumbrous and complicated."

An instant's pause; then the level voice continued. She was thinking aloud rather than talking to him.

"I don't know just where you and mother slipped up, but as long as I can remember you never did anything together. You were very busy. I suppose you could n't go about much with mother. She was running patriotic societies and literary clubs, though she 's rather ashamed of it when you remind her of it now. Anyway, she tired of them after a while, and then the bee buzzed in her bonnet of going to live abroad so as to educate me under the best influences. She said—and I 'm sure she believed—that it was her duty to be near me during my formative years. But she was really bored at home."

"And what do you suggest that I should have done? Kept her at home to be bored?"

"Told her you could n't get along without her. Then she would n't have been bored."

Honor suddenly rose, throwing wide her arms as if to sweep away webs of misunderstanding.

"Oh, can't you see what we women want? You lavish everything in the world on us except just yourselves. You are too busy to play with us, and so you give us all sorts of expensive and beautiful toys—houses and clothes and travel. And of course we get tired of it all. Children always get tired of toys and want new ones. And so we get the reputation—and deserve it—of being the most restless, extravagant women in the world. But I don't think we are the happiest, dad."

"What makes us so busy, Honor? It is trying to give our womenkind everything that Smith, next door, gives his womenkind."

"Yes, I know. You are busy because we 're frivolous, and we are frivolous because you 're busy."

"Where do you propose to start your reform?"

"I don't propose to start it at all. I don't see what anybody can do about it. You and mother are just like all the other girls' fathers and mothers. You never see her without dreading that she 'll ask you to do something you don't want to do and ought not to do but will end by doing. And mother thinks you a selfish obstructionist who has n't the real in-

terests of the family at heart.—I can't see that I am doing so badly to take Willie Smith."

Since he had made her speak, he would not stop her. She went on after a moment in the lighter tone he liked no better than her vehemence.

"Mother will tell everybody that we are infatuated with each other. 'I believe the child never once remembered that fortune.' Mother rather overdoes it at times."

"And shall you go about proclaiming that you are marrying him for his money?"

"I shall say nothing at all. But of course they will all think that, and I 'm very glad to have them."

Her father looked at her as if he was not sure whether she were really a human girl. She went on:

"I have been bred up to marry money, just as if I had been a horse bred up to trot, though of course mother thought me coarse when I said so. Then, when I win my stakes, which everybody knows I am after, why have to talk about 'even as Isaac and Rebecca'? I declare, I should want a civil ceremony, not a church service at all, only that nobody supposes for a moment that the church service means any-

thing. 'Till death us do part!' And half the people that say it are divorced."

Hammond came over to her, laying his hand on her shoulder and saying in his caressing voice:

"My dear, you are not happy."

She shook off the hand.

"I shall be happier than I have been in this house. There is nothing real here—nothing that you can count on as true. You are not so bad as mother in public. You don't make a fool of yourself and me. But I think you are worse, really; for mother almost believes her pretenses. You don't. She thinks that her aims are noble and right. But you have n't any aims."

"I don't have time. It is all that I can do to scrape together money for my wife's aims."

"Ah, you call me barbarous, but I say nothing so hard of you as you say of yourself, father. You confess that you have n't any aims; you just slave your life out to gratify mother's—which you don't believe in."

"You will understand better when you are older, Honor."

"It is only the young that know anything, father. When you have spent fifty years tell-

ing yourself and hearing other people tell you that black is white you get to think it 's all a dirty gray."

Hammond laughed with less of bitterness than his tone had held a moment ago.

"I am afraid that I 've reached that stage, daughter, where I no longer fling out at anything. What is the use? It is much of a muchness. Let us change the topic from my failure to your success."

"You will admit that it is a success?"

"I am very happy, my dear,—more happy than you can understand,—that you are to marry a rich man. This is n't sordid, I think —the longing to have my girl free from the killing strain of money-worry."

She was not struck by the bitter ring of his voice.

"I don't see why one should n't be just as happy without love, do you, father?" she mused. "I suppose you are not so rapturous in the beginning, but then you have n't any disillusion because you never had any illusion."

"And dollars are a very solid good."

"They are. Now how can you tell whether you really get love or not? 'Men were deceivers ever.' But a house on the Park won't fly away in the night."

"The glamour of the honeymoon has to fade, my dear. Then you want a safety-net to tumble into from the heights. Money is about the best thing I know to break the fall."

"But you forget that I have n't any heights to fall from. I never was in love."

A possible reason for her hardness occurred to him.

"Are you sure, dear, that you never were?"

"Never in the world," she answered, with a perfectly unembarrassed laugh. "That is, not since the days of Bim."

"Who was he—a dog?"

"No; he was that cousin of the Grantleys' that I used to walk the back fences with. When I said good-by to him I cried all the way home. I was eleven, I think. He is the only person in the world that I ever loved dearly."

"Then you consider a mercenary marriage a sort of ark of safety?"

"I think so, father."

He laid his hands on her shoulders, forcing her to meet his eyes.

"Dear, if you are sure that you are going to be happy, I am very happy for you—more glad than you can know. I want to see you settled. You will have nobody when I am

gone. And I am glad that you are to have all that money; that beautiful house; means to collect all manner of lovely things about you; to travel; to know the best people everywhere; to have everything that enriches and adorns life. I don't think that I 'm romantic. I married for love; we were very much in love, both of us. But I am inclined to think that people get on best where there is respect and liking, but not love; where the marriage is a calm contract, each side bringing to the partnership something which the other values. You are less likely to be disappointed. And yet—"

"And yet you hate to have me, as a bride, put into words what you have just said?"

"Yes. It 's illogical, I admit; but I had rather you came to me blushing and said that you were engaged to the loveliest fellow in the world."

"And inwardly you would think that I had n't half as much security of happiness as I shall have with Willoughby Smith."

"I don't believe that I like logical women."

"And I hate unfair men—and women. Oh, they do these things better in France. There they marry for convenience and don't talk cant about it. Dad, would you expect me

to refuse Willoughby Smith just because I don't happen to entertain a romantic affection for him?"

"Honor, is it necessary always to call a spade a spade? Let us leave something unsaid, just for once."

"No; let us be honest, just for once. You were delighted when I told you that I was engaged to him—I saw it in your face. But you are American, you and mother, and the American tradition that one must marry for love dies hard. You always expected me to make a rich marriage, but you expected me to save the situation by falling in love with the rich man. That would relieve the American conscience. If I can't manage it, the least I can do is to pretend to. I think you demand a good deal of your daughter."

"I am not aware that I have ever made this demand you so harp on—that you should marry money."

She moved about the room, gathering up her wraps.

"Oh, no; it was never put into words—that would n't be proper in this country. Good-night, father."

"Good-night." He followed her to open the door, and spoke again in a friendlier tone.

"This is n't a quarrel, is it, my dear? You and I never quarrel. I am very glad and proud, little daughter; believe it."

He kissed her on each cheek. She accepted the caress without returning it.

"Good-night, father. Thank you for your patience."

"Good-night, my lovely girl."

He opened the door for her with the charming courtesy he had even for his own family. A strand of her hair had fallen loose on her shoulder; he lifted it and kissed it as she passed him. She looked back with a smile.

"I don't wonder people fall in love with you, father!"

So the scene had ended politely, prettily even, as he always wanted scenes to end—and to begin, too. Her bomb-throwing must have been a trial to him. At the head of the stairs the girl abruptly turned about and knocked at his closed door. When he opened it, she thought—as she had been before too self-centered to think—how worn and tired he looked.

"A glove lost, dear?"

"No, father. An opportunity lost. I came up here to-night thinking that perhaps this—this beginning of a new life for me would be the beginning of our understanding

each other better. I do love you so much, but we don't get on. To-night I meant to make things better, and I have only made them a thousand times worse. No, no; I won't come in now. You are tired, and so am I. But won't you just believe that I did n't come to be horrid? I came to be nice."

"You are always nice, my darling," he answered, with his instinctive polite responsiveness, taking her in his arms. But if his pretty speech was automatic, his kiss and his strain of her to his heart seemed to her real. She went down-stairs comforted.

CHAPTER VII

MR. ALDEN DREAMS

DENYS made it his rule never to ruffle Maurice's tranquility just before or after a meal, or at bedtime. He maintained that the delicate nervous organization of an artist might be irreparably injured by any disturbance of his digestion or his sleep. And though experience testified that nothing could upset Maurice's excellent habits, still it amused his keeper to invent a code of exemplary little rules and obey them. To hygienic scruples, then, Maurice attributed his comrade's taciturnity on their way home from the reception. Next morning he expected a flow of conversation from Denys, who liked as much as any woman to " talk it over."

To his amused surprise, an unaccountable interdict seemed to have been laid upon the subject. Denys made laboriously polite conversation about trifles, and balanced with exaggerated acumen the clauses of a new business agreement. At rehearsal he sat dumb, to

the astonishment and relief of Hirt, who was accustomed, during these hours of storm and stress, to expect from him a frenzy of suggestions too admirable to be ignored and too troublesome to be followed. During the evening he was ostentatiously engaged in correspondence, while Maurice lay on the divan chuckling over " The Disentanglers."

It was Maurice who, next day, broke a silence which seemed to have become almost sullen.

" Denny, what *are* you worriting about? " he asked, laying an affectionate hand on his friend's shoulder. " I can't make you out. The only appearance in society was all right, was n't it? Mrs. Fanning *is* charming, and *how* well that little girl plays! *She* is the sort of American girl that makes the women of all other nations seem awkward and slow. She 's as pretty as red shoes, too. Her musical gift is rather gilding refined gold. She could do without it. But she is n't a bit spoiled. She is easy to talk to, she understands what you don't say, and she 's warm-hearted. It is n't all on the surface, either. The better you know her, the better she 'll pan out. The man that gets her gets a prize. Great occasion, on the whole, was n't it? "

"Very satisfactory," answered Denys, without looking up from his newspaper.

Lifting his expressive eyebrows, Maurice sauntered off to the piano.

Denys mused. Without doubt, this was fine, hearty speech—a little too frank and hearty, one might demur, for lover's praise. Yet he knew so well Maurice's uncivilized directness that it seemed quite like him to fall in love without thought of concealment or embarrassment. Although, for all his candor, Denys could not, even after thirty-six hours of brooding, quite picture himself inquiring the boy's intentions, in the heavy-father manner, yet when he saw the tenor sitting idle before the keyboard, his eyes fixed on vacancy for ten consecutive minutes, he felt that it deserved the name of portent. Maurice thinking!

For two distressful nights had vague misgivings haunted Denys's troubled sleep and waking hours. By daylight he could see the absurdity of supposing that, after two meetings, either Maurice or Margery would have fallen in love with the other. Yet he could not forget Margery's face as she praised Tolna, nor their evident mutual understanding. He assured himself stoutly that they were making

friends for his sake. But if they were attracted ever so slightly, it was imperative that the girl should learn at once the truth about Tolna. He knew that his nerves were overstrung. He perceived the wisdom of silence, and thereupon he spoke:

"For a man who affects to despise the sex, it strikes me that you 're uncommon complimentary, Maurice!"

Maurice laughed. "So that 's its name? I saw that you had got up a brand-new grievance, Denny. I don't affect to despise the sex, mine ancient. I don't even despise it. Like all sensible men, I hold that it 's made up of women and not of angels. Personally, I prefer that distribution. But the few specimens you 've allowed me to approach hitherto have n't seemed necessary to my happiness. Last night, you see, youth and beauty happened to have brains and breeding, too. Of course I was a foredoomed victim. You 've protected me from that fatal combination up to this time. Alas! Denny, 'the shafts at random sent found mark the archer little meant.'"

Against his will, Denys blundered on:

"Do you mean it, Maurice? Have you met your fate?"

"I wonder! I 'm not an expert. Some of

the cardiac symptoms may be irregular. For bonny Annie Laurie I 'd not lay me down and dee,—which is, I have read, the patient's indicative condition. Denys, this is a crisis. I must reflect. Forsaking all others, could I cleave only to her till— No, I really can't give you up, my son; so I hope she won't make it a condition. But I can imagine myself giving up all my other bad habits and evil companions on the day that she graciously consents to become a substitute. How do you diagnose my peculiar case, Doctor Alden?"

"Must you always grin through a horse-collar, Maurice? Can't you treat even a lady with respect? If you ask me—it is n't in you to love. When I think of what you would give and what you would get,—it 's too monstrous! To you, life is a gigantic jest. To her —to any imaginative girl, ignorant of the world—it 's— Maurice, it can't be argued about. I am trying to be fair. You did n't make yourself."

Maurice whirled about on the music-stool, his eyes shining with mischief.

"Mighty good job, though, if I can't claim the credit. Look here, Denny, I 'm a regular violet-by-a-mossy-stone, as you very well know when you 're not in a wax. But if I

must speak up for myself, I will remark that I feel within me, all a-buddin' and a-growin', the makings of a meek and lowly American-patent husband, prepared to efface himself and hand over to his wife the family thinking. I 'll earn the money, and she shall spend it. She shall decree, and I will obey. And if that won't make a fellow-countrywoman happy, tradition and observation are alike at fault. Come, Denny; you beg my modest question. Was I a howling success on Sunday night, or was I not? Old Hirt will put up 'standing-room only' for the next three weeks, on the strength of the free advertising you 've secured. Why sit ye there so mumchance?"

"I have no right to question you, I know—"

"Then don't, Denys. Take the advice of a humble admirer. Omniscience is n't really good for you, though your constitution stands the strain so wonderfully. So just let the weak and erring flounder on in their own chosen paths. If we win out, you 'll have a pleasant surprise; and if we don't, you 'll have known it all along. Indifference to the troubles of your fellow-creatures is the only grace your character lacks, my dear young friend."

"Are you telling me to mind my own business, Maurice?"

"To my refined ear your phrasing seems less happy than my own—which you don't appear to find obscure."

An angry red burned in Denys's cheek.

"For thirteen years I have considered you more my business than anything in the world —except one. Do you wish me to give up my office?"

"Bless you, no, Denny. At least I don't want you to give *me* up. If you could conduct a retail concern as Earthly Providence, so to say, instead of a wholesale and commission one—take Saturdays and Sundays off, perhaps? How can you know what 's in me, you old Solomon, so long as I must n't dance unless you pull the string? Not in me to love, eh? Why, my one social experience has revealed me to myself as a headlong sentimentalist. I have n't a doubt that I 'm various other equally interesting characters, if you 'd let me find it out."

Denys took up his hat. Through all the boy's nonsense there sounded, in the ear of the listener, a new note of purpose. Though Maurice would admit nothing, Denys had always believed that, once in earnest, his

sweetness and charm would win any maid. And now his admiration for Margery was so evident that her knight-errant saw his own hard devoir staring him in the face.

"I must beg your pardon," he said stiffly, "for my well-meant tyrannies. You will admit, I suppose, that there is only one thing to do now?"

"For me to beg yours, perhaps? You will admit, I suppose, that I at least have kept my temper—under some provocation."

Denys's hand was on the door-knob.

"I am on my way to do penance," he answered. "I am going to confess."

Maurice's open face expressed a surprise so great as to resemble dismay. Denys glanced at him and went on sharply:

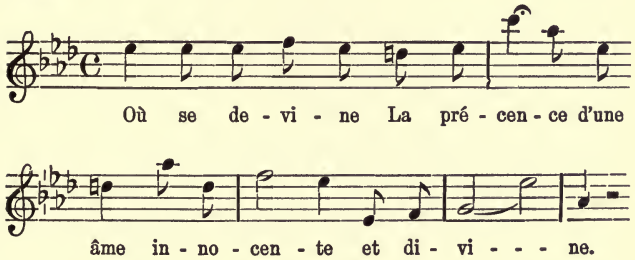
"I don't hear the enthusiasm I expected from the tireless advocate of the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Have I your permission to tell it?"

Maurice shrugged his shoulders.

"I understood that I was n't to be consulted," he answered, going back to his notes.

Denys hesitated again. Still hurt and irritated, he was even more bewildered. A real disagreement with Maurice was a thing unbelievable. Yet every word that he had

spoken had marred his cause instead of mending.



trolled out Maurice, reaching and holding his crystalline high C with as conscientious a precision as if slighted love and wounded friendship had no place in his world.

Defeated, Denys closed the door and plunged into the street.

What worse pain was likely to follow his confession to Margery, he did not ask himself. It was she only who was to be considered. Neither he nor Maurice counted in the reckoning.

Miss Fanning was at home, and, had he known it, in a somewhat chastened mood. The only thing to be predicted of Margery's spirits was that they never stayed long in the same key. Her flights of daring were succeeded by a shivering timidity; her peccadil-

los, by quick repentances. Last night she had gleefully tried to make her slave jealous of the Celebrity. To-day she felt with intensity her unkindness to poor Denys. Monsieur Tolna understood perfectly that she was not flirting. She had no compunctions about him. But Denys had bade her good-night with a look of pain that she hated to think of. All readiness to make reparation, she ran down the stairs, resolved to be very kind to him.

At the foot of the flight she suddenly halted; her face and neck crimsoned. The remembrance of the much that he had said, of the more that he had looked, at the reception, implied the imminence of the one question; and, in his inmost heart, how could he doubt her answer?

She felt half inclined to hide herself away and postpone the beautiful moment that seemed so near. Then she straightened her slim shoulders, holding her head up proudly, ashamed to shrink from her happiness. Making sure in the hall mirror that she was only pink enough to look pretty, she gave her hair a last fluff, pulled out the sash of her dainty gown, and airily entered the drawing-room.

With the superior composure of her sex in these crises, she chattered easily of the party

till her guest's inattention became too marked to be longer ignored. A little nervously—

"What is the matter?" she demanded. "You look as if you had come to bury Cæsar, when I want you to praise him. Praise everything, Mr. Alden: the music, the guests, the flowers, the supper, the hostesses. Nothing less will satisfy me."

"I can't praise anything but your playing, Miss Fanning. I don't remember anything but that."

She glowed beautifully.

"I am so pleased that you liked it."

"What will please you more—Tolna was delighted."

"And why should it please me more, Mr. Alden? He is no better critic than you."

She made her little compliment with her prettiest smile, when he replied disagreeably:

"My opinion hardly counts. You were playing for him."

Margery was provoked. Having repented of her effort to make Denys jealous, having vowed to herself to torment him no more, and having attempted to blot out the offense by a present demeanor all sweetness, it was to her as if the offense had never existed. Most tiresome and ungenerous of the man to be

still harping on this old string, she thought with rising color.

He went on after a moment:

"His presence was the event of the evening to you?"

"Of course," she said defiantly.

"I saw at once that you and he felt in touch, that you were talking together as if you had known him all your life. That curious *rapport* at a first meeting—you felt it with him, Miss Fanning?"

It is to be noted that Denys had not considered it proper to mention her name to Maurice, nor to question him thus closely, though years of guardianship might be thought to give him a right, and though his friend had shown no over-susceptible temper. But Margery, a human sensitive-plant, he was probing without mercy. Girls, she said to herself, indignantly, have to suffer (for their own good, it is assumed) an amount of badgering about their love-affairs to which no one dreams of subjecting a man. It would be hard indeed if they might not make reprisals.

While her indifference to Monsieur Tolna's charms spared her any embarrassment, it did not avert her wrath from his ally. Folding

her hands in her lap, she looked steadily into Denys's troubled face.

"Have you been to the Water-color Exhibition, Mr. Alden? Hyacinth Lawrence has a landscape on the line. She is the most amazing genius, that girl. Did you understand that she arranged our whole Hungarian theme on Sunday night? Even Herr Hoffmann said that it was masterly. And as to her painting, did you know that she never seriously studied it till last year?"

The even, conventional tones seemed to madden Denys. He sprang to his feet.

"I did n't come to discuss water-colors and scales. I came to tell you—about Tolna."

She was completely taken aback. What could possibly justify this portentous beginning? Unless—she blushed with confusion at her own blushing. Certainly, Tolna had been most friendly with her, and she with him. Had he misunderstood her meaning? She had been so sure that she had seen his unguarded admiration for another girl, so sure that he knew she had seen it. She tried to laugh off her misgiving.

"Well, Mr. Alden, what is it? Like Pet Marjorie's bereaved fowl, I am 'more than

usual calm.' Nothing can be half so serious as you look."

"He wanted me to tell you. He thought it was your right to know."

In his eagerness to make it plain that he was betraying Tolna by Tolna's own consent he blundered on unfortunate phrases. And she, with no suspicion of the actual secret, could surmise but one reason for such a confidence as threatened her. But if it were she whom he desired, how could the man have looked so at Honor Hammond, with all his soul in his eyes?

"If you blame him, Miss Fanning,—if you think he is n't absolutely sincere and single-minded,—notwithstanding what may seem to you mercenary, you do him a great injustice. The fault is altogether mine. Things did n't look the same in Europe. I could n't have borne that he should fail, and it seemed to me the only way. I was all wrong. I ought to have told you everything. But I could n't foresee what has happened."

Margery looked at him in blank amazement. His haggard face, his stammering speech, his penitential aspect—was this the blithe, self-confident Denys? Suddenly she understood. *What* had seemed to Denys the

only way to success? *What* had not looked the same in Europe? *What* might she think mercenary? Why, a marriage for money, of course. Tolna could not be rich. Miss Hammond, beautiful though she was, had nothing, while she herself— Only too well did Margery comprehend the usual ambition of foreigners of ancient line. Any girl with a million in her own right is taught to look upon herself as the natural prey of the fortune-hunter.

She sprang to her feet, her eyes flashing.

"No more, Mr. Alden. I will hear nothing more from you concerning Monsieur Tolna."

"Miss Fanning, I am most unhappy to disobey you; but, in barest justice to him and to you—and to me, if that weighs with you, I must go on."

"I can leave the room, Mr. Alden, if you insist."

He stopped her, clutching her wrist, his agitation getting beyond his control at sight of hers.

"You shall not go! What right have you to treat me so? Can't you see what it costs me to tell you the truth—about my dearest friend? I don't count myself. God knows I 'd hold my tongue forever, now the

harm is done, if it were n't a point of honor. It is his due—and yours. I must n't think of what I lose. Margery, on Sunday night I saw—I could n't help seeing—how perfectly you understood each other—as if you had been friends for years, instead of hours. But even then I did n't believe, because I could n't believe—not till this morning could I face the possibility—not till he told me— And then I knew that I had kept silence too long. I came straight here—to confess to you how he—how I—Margery, in God's name tell me whether you—whether you—Margery, won't you answer me?"

His eyes were like some tortured animal's, his voice a sob of suspense and pain. All her little coquetries, doubts, resentments, reserves, dropped from her. Her eyes were two beacon-lights flashing love and joy as she cried:

"Oh, Denys, you know!"

The admission boldly made, she looked away in sudden terror. But he did not touch her. After a moment, in an easy voice, with even a note of raillery in it, he said:

"I congratulate Maurice."

And his face had said so unmistakably that he was asking for himself! Her heart stood still.

Of course all their speech had been of Tolna. But she, credulous fool! because for her no other man than Denys existed, must needs think that he spoke of himself. It did not occur to her to reflect that if she had read his question wrong, she must have read his love truly. No loyal anxiety for his friend could blanch his cheeks as they had blanched then. But she was incapable of weighing evidence, her whole being swamped in dismay at having committed a girl's unpardonable sin—offered her love where it was not asked. Helpless, she hid her face in her hands. Presently Denys went on:

"This is the most beautiful thing that ever could have happened in my life. My dearest friend, and my pearl among women!"

She saw that she could never, never let Denys guess his mistake. Her imagination, flying forward over the logical consequences of standing by the misapprehension, pictured her actually standing before the altar with Tolna, bridesmaids, ushers, and a church full of curious onlookers bearing witness to the irrevocableness of her vows. This very afternoon, she resolved, her mother should take tickets for Japan.

She thrust up her hands, palms out, as if to

push away something that smothered her, crying out in a last effort to escape:

"But he—you can't know. You must be wrong. What am I to him? You said yourself that he was the mere friend of an hour. He has seen me but that once."

Denys, embarked on a career of misunderstandings, of course misread her distress. Still, in his tone of careful lightness he answered:

"When one *Romeo* of Verona had seen a lady only once— "

"But this is n't the fourteenth century. And—and he knows that I am rich."

Denys started.

"Margery, you don't mean that?"

"Not of you," she cried quickly, ashamed that even for a moment she had thought him a partner in his friend's abominable scheme. "No, you never meant to sacrifice *me*. Over there, when you merely speculated about some unknown rich girl who would be only too glad to exchange her money for his title, it would n't seem the same, I know. But Monsieur Tolna can't care for me. It is my fortune," she declared roundly, out of the disgust she felt for that base creature. Then, remembering her confession that she loved him, she stammered, "At least, I—I don't feel

sure of him," and took refuge in a burst of tears.

His hand was on her shoulder.

" Margery, Margery, what can you mean? Maurice never had a mercenary thought in his life. He loves you—you yourself. You do him the greatest injustice if you believe that he has once thought of your money. I have known him from a child. I have never seen a nature more honest, generous, unselfish. No man in the world is good enough for you, but Maurice Tolna is the least unworthy. I am not his ambassador. I must n't repeat to you what he said to me this morning, because it is his right to say it to you himself. But if you earned your bread it would be all one to him, except that he would have the joy of earning it for you. You believe me, my child? "

Her sobs were hushed. She sat silent and thoughtful. But one more thing was demanded of him. To save her the least shadow of unhappiness, not only must he praise his rival, he must conceal the rivalry. Not only must he suffer the martyr's pang, he must thrust aside the martyr's crown.

Since she did not look up, his gallant smile was hardly worth the effort it cost him.

" Your happiness and my dearest friend's," he said. " It is my dream come true."

She gave him one fleeting glance.

" Denys, I cannot understand it. Are we both tangled up in a dream? Shall we wake and find that nothing is changed since the other night? Oh, that would be so much the best thing! "

Into Denys's haggard eyes leaped a sudden hope. He bent over her. "Margery," he said softly —

A silken rustle in the doorway was followed by the gay irruption of Mrs. Burnham, devastator of opportunities.

" Hello, Margery! " she cried. "Well met, Mr. Alden! Will you and your prodigy dine with us, on the third, to meet the Prince? "

" Unluckily for us, Mrs. Burnham, the prodigy performs that evening."

" Why, of course; we 're all going to see him do it afterward. How stupid of me! Why did n't you import two of them, while you were about it, Mr. Alden? There is n't enough of one to go round. A double would work beautifully."

Denys had taken up his hat. The smile was shadowy with which he answered:

" One Tolna may yet be my undoing, dear lady."

CHAPTER VIII

MR. ALDEN WAKES

DENYS never knew how he covered the mile or two between the Fanning house and Thirty-fifth Street. To his consciousness, he walked out of Margery's door into his own, whence Maurice was issuing, very smart in riding-clothes.

"Give up your ride to-day, boy. I want to speak to you."

It was a sunny, still, winter afternoon, New York at its best, when the very air seems electric with the city's eager spirit.

"Have I got to sign a contract?" said Maurice. "I 'd rather ride."

"You almost quote Browning."

"Heaven forefend!" the singer cried, crossing himself.

The Tolna of Denys's imagination would not have done this.

"Don't!" he cried sharply.

Maurice looked amused.

"Turning monk? What 's up?"

"Come into the house," bade Denys, leading the way. The other followed, half reluctant, half curious. He had quite forgotten his annoyance with his comrade. When the chief's eyes burned and his dark cheek was tinged with red, schemes unpredictable were bubbling in his restless brain. Marking his embarrassed excitement, Maurice prepared with amusement to hear some proposition out-Denysing Denys's usual whimsicality and daring.

"Well, let 's have it," he prompted, as the schemer remained deep in reverie.

But Denys still hung silent. Notwithstanding his momentary doubt, he had told himself, on leaving Margery, that he could not be wrong. No girl, he thought, could be unmoved by Tolna's face and voice and manner, while Margery must feel that she already knew him well. By the depth of his own devotion to her, he measured his obligation to secure her happiness.

On his road here his errand had seemed simplicity itself—merely to tell Maurice what a treasure was his, to exhort him to be worthy of it. If he loved her, as Denys now dared not doubt, she had already her heart's desire. Even if his outspoken admiration were not

yet more than admiration—why, even then, in the awe-struck mood, exalted, yet humble, which must follow his knowledge that an angel had stooped to love him, the boy would be wax to grant any service, any sacrifice. So Denys planned with god-like confidence—till his self-assurance was riven by no greater blow than the sight of Tolna's riding-suit. The picture was out of focus. You simply could not imagine a romantic lover in such extremely modish clothes.

In an every-day voice Denys began to feel his way.

"I 've been thinking of the many changes of arrangement that you and I must make, should you marry."

There was no mistaking it: Maurice jumped.

"What makes you say that?"

"It was just a speculation," Denys proceeded, still warily. "You are the kind of person to whom his home life means a great deal."

"I am said to be the original of the man who never cared to wander from his ain fireside."

"All you need to complete your domesticity is a wife."

"If I had a wife, I should n't be domestic."

"Don't talk that cheap cynicism."

"Oh, I 'd ask nothing better than to sit at home with her. But I should n't be let. She 'd want to go to things every other minute. However, Denys, when you talk of my nuptials, I think you mean your own."

"If you mean my friendship for Miss Fanning," Denys said steadily, "that is no more than a friendship."

"The way you looked at her the other night would make old Plato turn in his grave."

"I am very fond of her, as I have been of her mother all my life. But I think of her as a little sister. I have never asked her to marry me, nor do I intend to."

"I beg your pardon, old man," Maurice said, with more seriousness than he had yet shown. "I 'm sure I don't know why people should always jump to one conclusion when a man shows that he likes a girl."

"It occurred to me that you might have misunderstood my interest in the family, so I wanted to tell you that you need n't be held back by any scruple about me."

Maurice laughed out.

"My dear fellow, I 'm not an aspirant."

"You—you were n't taken with her?

Why, you said, this morning, that you were a foredoomed victim. You said that you—that she— Maurice, you almost quarreled with me about her."

"So the lamb r'iled up the stream, did he, you poor, innocent wolf? Oh, Denys, don't you know, yet, when I 'm trying to get a rise out of you? Or if it was n't all chaff—I thought Miss Fanning charming, of course. No chance for argument there. But I 'd rather not marry her, if it 's all the same to you, my friend."

His smile was more final than the hottest protest. Denys's world reeled. His first feeling was an instinctive joy that the other man did not claim her. Then he remembered the wonderful look with which she had avowed her love, and the positive assurance he had given her that that love was returned.

At his face of dismay, his comrade began to laugh again.

"Of course I want to marry *you* off. It will be nuts to me to see my jailer in irons. But why you should want to marry me off; to share your slave—"

"But even if you have n't thought of it, think of it now. She 's pretty and good and clever and rich—"

"Denys, in this country the occupation of match-making is generally left to old ladies. I suppose it 's your European training that enables you to take it up without a man's natural shame."

"Maurice—"

"Confound the cold-blooded European grossness of the thing! I raise the red flag of rebellion. I should be something less than a free-born American if I let myself be manœuvered by a match-maker. I 'd give up the only girl I ever loved sooner than have an old lady—of either sex—get the credit of the affair."

"I had no intention of grossness, Maurice, when I hoped that my dearest friend and the daughter of my oldest friend might fancy each other. I certainly would have done anything I could to further that end."

"You 're *too* kind. But understand once for all, Denys, that I intend to pick out my wife for myself. I am not such a lunatic as to tie myself up to a life-partner unless there 's a straight-out, genuine, name-blown-in-the-glass, signature-on-every-package, warranted-to-stand-all-climates, rain-and-dust-proof, all-wool-and-three-miles-wide love between us."

Under a tone of jest, the young man's voice was vibrant with resentment. But Denys scarcely realized the earnestness of a feeling that finds expression in flippant words.

"Maurice, you don't see that I 'm serious. If I introduce a lady's name, it is n't in idleness."

"Naturally not. I knew it was some new advertising dodge."

He spoke with deliberate offensiveness, calculated to bar Denys off the subject. But Denys pursued doggedly, with a grieved patience:

"You would not jest if you knew how sacred—"

"On a subject a man considers sacred, he 'd better keep still."

"Sometimes it is his hard duty to speak. Maurice—I—count myself much to blame."

Maurice dropped into a chair.

"Denys, I don't like this conversation. But if you must go on, go on, and get done as soon as you can."

Denys began in a low voice, his eyes on the flames.

"Last summer, all those eight weeks that I was with them in the Tyrol, I used to talk to Margery constantly of you. I was full of

you. She looked forward with delight to meeting you here this winter. She had all a musician's interest in you as a singer. What more natural than that your name should be always on our lips? Fool that I was, never to see what I was bringing about! I might have guessed the other night. To-day I went there to make a clean breast of it, but before I had time to confess I found out that she loved you."

Maurice groaned out:

"Loved that ass, Tolna, you mean."

No Nathan could have said, "Thou art the man," more sternly than Denys pronounced, "You are Tolna."

"But Tolna 's not I. Any one capable of falling in love with Tolna, I, for one, have no sympathy with."

"You are not Jekyll and Hyde. You are precisely the same person in this room that you are on the stage."

"Granted; but I 'm not the person she thinks I am."

"Of course she idealizes you. If girls did n't idealize us, the human race would die out."

"I don't object to being idealized—I can imagine finding it quite pleasant. But I do

object to being taken for another man. The child's imagination is kindled by a paladin in tin armor that sings solos. Am I a tin paladin?"

"Don't quibble."

"I 'm not quibbling. I 'm proving an alibi," Maurice laughed. "For three hours, two or three times a week, I 'm the tin paladin. The rest of the time I 'm Morris Fordham, of whose commonplace existence she has n't a guess. You 've filled her romantic head with your Tolna fairy-tales—"

"You can't separate yourself from Tolna."

"Don't I wish I could!"

"But it is n't only the stage hero that she reveres. She has seen and talked with the private you."

"For four minutes, in my lumbering French! Much that counts, against all your ecstatics. My high birth, my exile, my consecrated purpose—the Lord alone that made you knows where your imagination stops. I 'm sorry for that little girl. She 's been gold-bricked.

"A history one thumping lie,
A name that was n't true—
No more of me you knew, my love,
No more of me you knew."

He broke off singing to laugh, then straightway to grow grave at sight of Denys's face.

"Denys, you think I 'm a brute to laugh, but I should be a fatuous fool if I took it seriously."

"It is serious."

"No, my son. Unpleasant, mortifying, even a little disgraceful, perhaps, but not serious. This girl's fancy is taken with a perfectly imaginary being. When she finds there is no such person, she 's all over it, and no harm done."

"Maurice, don't you see? Though I may have set her dreaming of Tolna, now she knows you. It 's no vague dream now. It 's the real you."

"Denys, don't *you* see—but honestly, I believe you don't! You 've proclaimed this Tolna myth till I don't believe you realize that it is a myth. You don't know where the truth stops and fancy begins. You never plainly acknowledge to yourself that the Magyar noble, the inspired genius, the exalted patriot, the remote, mysterious, irreproachable, unapproachable Tolna, is a flippant young Yankee with a slangy tongue and an eye to the main chance."

"Because you 've no right to be that—you can't remain that!" Denys protested hotly. "I have told you that I created Tolna because there ought to be a Tolna. As every old house demands its ghost, as every cliff has its lover's leap, every church its miracle, so your romantic aspect cried aloud for the legend to make it glorious. An unromantic musician! The thing is disgraceful! As well a cowardly soldier, a sailor sick at sea. There was no harm in it, Maurice; no wrong whatsoever. I did it not half so much to cheat the public as to satisfy my own sense of the fitness of things. *I* blushed for your crassness, if you don't."

"'Lies is lies, Pip,'" Maurice quoted dryly. "We 've got sweetly snarled up in this one of yours. Though I do count myself the more to blame, for I always thought the Tolna business shady. But for the sake of peace, and for fun too, I let you go on with it. Such giving-in is meaner than cheerful go-ahead crime for crime's sake, like yours."

"Then if you take the blame, Maurice, make the atonement."

"Say in English what you mean."

"There 's only one possible course."

"To tell her, as you very sensibly resolved this morning."

"We can never tell her. It will kill her."

"It will mortify her, perhaps. Yes, of course it will. But I imagine that a healthy anger at being 'done' will help her over the shock. She 'll pay us both out, yet, or I 'm a Dutchman. That girl 's not all dreamy eyes. She 's no sweet *Ophelia* to lose her wits for the best *Hamlet* going. She 's got spirit, and a temper to match it."

"She 's got a heart, faith, ideals. She has been sheltered from every rude breath—she has never known a shock. If you kill her faith in the most beautiful figure that has ever come into her life, you kill the roots of faith in her. Why, this is her vision of heaven. If you reveal it as a barefaced cheat to get money, you murder her faith in God and man. You whirl the solid earth from under her—darken her sun."

"*I* darken her— Well, I like your cheek! Denny, I don't take love-affairs as seriously as you and other good people do. My Tolna experience is calculated to harden a man—make him either a coxcomb or a scoffer. But it 's my opinion that love has mighty little to do with the average love-affair. That 's just

an impulse of the blood, or of the fancy, or both. This girl has n't a real love for a real man. She 's got a brain-sick fancy for a figment of her imagination. When she learns the truth, she 'll be mortified and angry, no doubt. But you need n't talk about a broken heart."

"My God! don't you suppose I 've been over and over this hideous tangle? Don't you know that I 've tried to reason like you? Don't you believe that I wanted to tell her— I that love her? I have loved her since the day I first saw her. I have desired her for my wife. God! do I want her to love you?"

He was clear of all his tergiversations now, speaking his heart out at last.

"Tell her the truth, Denys!" Maurice cried. "Tell her to-night."

Denys's passionate face set sternly. He spoke quietly, but with the confidence of inspiration.

"No; I have considered every course, and I have decided. She is never to know—" He rose suddenly and stood over his friend, face and voice wonderfully moving in their profound earnestness. "Maurice, if you feel any gratitude for my teaching, any affection for the housemate of a dozen years, I charge

you now to help me. I care for what I ask of you now as I shall never care for anything in my life again."

Maurice answered in a low voice:

"What—what do you want of me?"

"I want you to be the man she thinks you. I want you to love her as she deserves to be loved."

Maurice got to his feet abruptly.

"Denys, for a moment you had me half hypnotized. You 're crazy, but you 're rather superb. When you find out that the girl you love is taken with an impostor, you don't expose him. You don't plead your own love. You kill all your own hopes. You propose the most colossal fraud in history, rather than cause her the momentary pain of a disillusion. It 's magnificent, Denys, but it is n't common sense; it is n't morals; it is n't even a practicability."

The fanatic gave way instantly to the man of affairs.

"I have thought it all out for you. Of course we must admit that you know English. We pretended otherwise to save you from reporters and the raids of society. As a matter of fact, we have spoken it together since you were fourteen. Fortunately, I have always

said frankly that you knew no Magyar, having been exiled as a child, cut off from friends and kindred, to be adopted by a chance stranger in a foreign land. It is one of the pathetic points of your story, that with all your passionate love of your country, you cannot speak your father's tongue. You shall never be tripped up. I can provide for everything."

"Denys, people like you either change the map of Europe or end behind prison bars."

"I want to keep up the Hungarian fiction, because if she finds that false she may think you false. It 's no harm to pretend that you 're a Hungarian. It 's of no consequence that you are an American. Count's son, cook's son, what matter, so long as you are the man she thinks you are?" Denys was racing up and down the room, his swift thoughts driving him. "We all love the uniforms, and the flags, and the music of the band. But we love them because they tell us how brave men die for a cause. The regiment that did n't go to the front is the showiest in town, but it marches through silent streets. The outward show is just the symbol. We have dull eyes, and we must be helped to see. Margery's eye is caught by the symbol, the

romance of the Magyar patriot, but what fires her heart is what underlies the romance—the high ideals, the unselfishness, the loyalty. You can't be Hungarian-born—what does that matter? You can be Tolna—the Tolna she sees."

"What of it? I don't love her."

"Love will come. It can't help but come. A stone would love her. It is the law of life that we love whom we serve."

"But scarcely whom we cheat. Though *you* might, Denys. You could marry a girl you did n't love, to save her feelings. You 'd make it a sort of game never to let her suspect, and you 'd enjoy your good acting so much that you 'd be as happy as a lark all day long, and end by believing your own pretense. Whereas I should feel a fraud and a fool, and sulk like a surly bear, and end by taking French leave."

"Is nothing to be sacred from your flippancy?"

"I 've suppressed a good deal of it for your sake, Denys, because I see that to you it 's tragedy. To me it 's farce."

"Can you jest at a girl's pure love?"

"Denys, if you wanted to rouse all my callousness and defiance and bad temper, you

could n't do better than to tell me of some one who is smitten with Tolna. What I feel for any girl who falls in love over the footlights is sheer disgust."

Denys turned white.

"Disgust? *Margery!* You damn yourself, not her. Your vulgar mind turns everything to vulgarity. Everything high and fine you smirch with your own commonness."

Maurice laughed out:

"And this is the man you put forward as Tolna!"

CHAPTER IX

NOT TO THE PURPOSE

EVERY morning, unless she was very tired after a party, or unless she preferred riding or skating, or felt it her duty to write up the minutes of the Girls' Friendly, or really must do shopping, or see the girls who dropped in—every morning, theoretically, Margery took her violin and went to practise with Hyacinth Lawrence. On the day after her talk with Denys she actually did go. She had heard that work is the best cure for a distraught mind. She foresaw that she might even determine to confide in her wiser friend.

Miss Lawrence lived alone in a dingy but eminently respectable apartment-house, just east of Fifth Avenue. Her flat was tiny, but, as Hyacinth said, it did what her father's huge Westchester mansion could never do—it expressed her individuality. The different styles of the different rooms, and the frequency with which she changed them all, suggested that multiple personality which is the despair of the psychologists. The miniature

dining-room had fallen a victim to " sincerity," as conceived by the makers of " mission " furniture. It was an obstacle-race to get round the huge chairs, while the table from which Hyacinth nibbled reed-birds and soufflés would have supported an ox roasted whole. Her bedroom looked like the inside of a jewel-box. " The soul of a bedroom must be expressed in daintiness," said the soulful one. Beyond this was her Japanese room. Tokonoma, kakemona, makemona, all were here, and their accomplished owner appeared to know which was which. Other furnishings there were none, save two thin blue cushions on the matting. It was Hyacinth's habit to receive visitors in this room. Whom she liked, she at once led into her sanctum. Whom she did not, she invited, with her impenetrable gravity, to an anemic cushion. When she first set up for herself her unorthodox gods, curiosity kept her door-bell a-twitter from morning till night. By the second winter it rang only for her friends.

The sanctum was the one large room. Built for a studio, it received its sole light from the lofty ceiling. Hyacinth disapproved of windows. She pronounced that this seclusion from even a glimpse of the whirling world-

this cutting off of jarring cross-currents, made the place truly a sanctuary. On the pale-green burlaps of the wall-hangings she had painted a bold design of tree-trunks and spreading branches. Entirely hiding the chimney-breast rose an Indian tepee, so arranged that the log-fire should seem to smolder in the middle of the tent. An ivy-vine painted on the skylight cast leafy shadows on the green drugget. A long green bench, velvet-covered, stretched along one whole side of the room, the rest of the furniture being made of cedar boughs with the bark on. Sockets, fitted to the wall against the painted trunks, held pine-torches. For this environment, its owner arrayed herself in a loose robe of Lincoln green, belted with silver bosses, her magnificent hair falling in braids below her knees. Seated at her roomy work-table, she was illuminating on vellum, in strict monastic style, Swinburne's " Hymn to Proserpine " when Margery arrived. Even this dearest friend might not come uninvited into the sanctum. But Hyacinth flew to clasp her in a rapturous embrace, and conduct her along the cramped passage to the door inscribed in carefully illegible old English, " The Wood at the World's End."

"Dearest, you have n't slept," Hyacinth noted at once.

"Not much," Margery confessed, balancing her hat and coat in the crotch of a tree.

"Do you regret that you refused Lord Charles?" asked the student of Yoga, with as much interest as the most frivolous butterfly.

"Decidedly not. I don't want him, or any man," Margery answered, taking the violin out of its case, as if she had no thought or time for anything but their practice. Sitting down with the instrument across her knees, she went into a brown study. Presently she remarked:

"Hyacinth, were you ever in love?"

"Only once, in this incarnation."

"And what happened?"

"Mother happened, of course!" replied the girl, unexpectedly dismounting from her transcendental stilts. "I think I 'll tell you," she went on, as if the remembrance still rankled. "He was my music-teacher, and a composer—and a genius. I believe he has had half a dozen decorations and honorary degrees since then. Among musicians, at any rate, he is a great man now. He was poor, and mother said that he was n't 'religious,' and that his family was 'common.'"

"And you did n't hold out?"

" Nobody in our house ever held out against mother, except Jessie, by fits and starts. Mother never contradicts you and never raises her voice. But you might as well argue with the Pyramids."

" Yet you found courage to run away and set up for yourself? "

" Oh, yes. But I was ten years older, and the instinct of self-preservation drove me. I was suffocating under mother's exhausted receiver. Even then, though, I could n't have done it without Jessie. Norton and Jessie insisted, and even mother's determination is no match for Norton's."

" Poor Hyacinth! " said Margery, softly stroking her friend's hand.

" Well, darling, it did take the taste out of things for a good while. But then," she added, suddenly mounting her stilts again, " it was kismet. It had to befall. That experience, having become a part of me, has ceased to exist *as* an experience. As I lost my love through no pettiness of my own, I am a loftier being because of the loss. You know, dear, all we mortals are certainly born twin souls, and the loftier soul that is the true other half of mine may not have been his whom I loved. It may be at this moment at prayer in

a Himalayan monastery. Or it may be but a puff of vapor on the Borderland of Consciousness, waiting through the eons its call to this earth again. Or it may dwell in human form on the other side of that wall, and I may never find it out in fifty years of life."

"Oh! But if he is on the other side of that wall you must meet him sooner or later."

"Not unless the Laws of Karma will it. If it is written that we should meet, he might be born under the gum-trees of Australia, and I might open my eyes to the light of the midnight sun; yet through jungle, through ice-pack, over mountain and flood, straight as the homing pigeons, we should come to each other."

"While if the stars said that you were not for each other, you might belong to the same Bridge Club and play at the same table without a thrill?"

Hyacinth ignored this flippancy.

"From that serener height won by suffering, I am able to see that my sorrow was but illusion."

"But, Hyacinth dear," Margery said, after a pause, "I am afraid that I don't understand exactly."

"Carbon, darling, may be the coal or the

diamond. So illusion takes opposite forms. Crime, cruelty, suffering, have no real power to hurt us. They are but illusion."

"That 's beautiful!"

"But we must never forget that they are not the perilous forms of illusion. Beauty and happiness are the most subtle, the most destroying."

Margery felt a sense of insecurity, as if the bench on which they sat might be mere illusion, the room a fog, and themselves in danger of dropping into space. Or was space, too, but illusion?

"Oh, but then, I don't see how you can be sure of anything," she protested.

"No, dear; you can't see it, yet," explained Hyacinth. "You must attain to vision. From each plane to which you climb with bleeding feet, you can look back with clarified gaze on the mistakes and delusions of the plane below. I thought I loved. I suffered because my love was forbidden. But when I rent the illusion I perceived that all was according to Law."

"Oh, then your mother was n't responsible, after all?"

"Yes, in a human sense. She was the remorseless agency of our suffering."

"Well, if you suffered so, I don't see what comfort it is to say that disappointment and loss are Law."

"Because, according to the same Law that seems so cruel now, the soul ordained for me is slowly but inevitably being made fit. It may be his whom ignorantly I loved. It may be another. Perhaps not even in the next life, perhaps never on this planet, perhaps dozens of lives, millions of stars from this, when we are fitted to each other, we shall be joined in the perfect whole."

"Hyacinth, there 's more method in this mysticism of yours than at first appears."

"It is like the swing of a pendulum. The farther it swings away from you, with the more energy does Law bring it back."

"But I always thought that the Buddhist's heaven—I suppose you are talking Buddhism —was Nirvana."

"In the final state," the priestess defined, "nothing exists but Buddha. Not even Individuality, not even Consciousness. We are as one with Buddha, in perfect peace. To reach Nirvana we must rid ourselves of all illusion, and whatever is of the senses is illusion. Greed and sensuality no more than Beauty and Art."

"But you are so inconsistent, Hyacinth. You do everything you can to foster beauty and art. You are two or three artists yourself."

Hyacinth's gentle smile pitied Margery's crudity.

"I suppose there is no one on this earth to-day, even the Mahatmas themselves (who are as far ahead of me as I am of a savage), but I suppose not one of them is within a million lives of Nirvana. In our present state of being we can hardly even pluck at the skirts of its mysteries. People often criticize Buddhism as vague. Dear child, it is a criticism of their own finite minds. As we climb, the view broadens. In our present state of being, we are just beginning to make stepping-stones of the baser illusions that are our dead selves. In this stage, don't you see, while we are still fighting to be free of the grosser sins, the beauties of nature and art, of friendship and love, are our greatest help. When we shall have slain all acknowledged sin, when the words of the litany cease to mean anything for us—then, and not till then, shall we be enabled to perceive that all which we have held good is as much a delusion as all which we have held base. Then, and not till

then, shall we have strength to fight Beauty as now we fight crime."

"Oh!" said Margery for the fourth time. Even as Clonclockety's performance on the pipes distinctly suggested an air, so through this fog of phrases bulked the dim outlines of a majestic order of creation; but something —Illusion, perhaps—seemed to prevent her getting a clear view of it. "Then you don't mean that we must begin this very minute hating everything that is lovely and of good report?"

"Oh, no, darling. Humanity is not ready yet; nor will it be for eons. But when we do reach the plane where Love and Beauty are no longer help, but hindrance, their hold on us will already have become so loosened that we shall leave them behind us without a pang."

"Like first teeth," said Margery, thoughtfully.

Hyacinth did not relish the comparison, yet her proposed punishment seemed rather in excess of the crime.

"I shall read you," she was threatening, "the Rig-Vedas," when Margery cried:

"No dear, don't! I have never been able to understand the books, but you make it all

so clear and so beautifully practical. If I follow you, one gets everything that one wants; and by the time that one must give up one's joys, benevolent Law has arranged that one should no longer want them." She rose to fend off Hyacinth's protests, wandering up and down the "wood," a modish dryad in a tailored suit. Smiling to herself, she mused: "Yes, I like your religion. But a million years does seem a long wait for a lover."

Hyacinth followed her across the room.

"Darling, I know that something troubles you. If you will trust me, all my love, all my thoughts, all the wisdom I have gleaned from saints and sages, shall be yours."

Margery knew that the sympathy was as sincere as its expression was affected. She pressed her friend's hand.

"Hyacinth, you are a great dear—when I make fun of you so. And you are just a mine of common sense, though you won't condescend to acknowledge it. Yes, you might see a way out if I were to tell you just what the matter is—"

But, as Hyacinth herself might have explained, it was not written in the stars that the confidence should be made. At this very moment a cheerful voice rang out from the passage.

"She won't blame you, Bridget. She knows that it takes more than you to stop me," and the doorway framed the jaunty figure of Mrs. Norton Burnham.

"HELLO, Nell! Hello, Madge! My stars!"

The newcomer stood still, while her eyes traveled round the sanctum.

The two girls had sprung to their feet, Margery startled, Hyacinth with a spot of angry red on each cheek.

"Well," exclaimed Mrs. Burnham, "all you want is the robins to come and cover you with leaves."

Margery recovered herself. "We 've no wicked uncle, but the wicked aunt is here," she smiled.

"The last time I saw the place, it was an Egyptian tomb," Mrs. Burnham pursued. "*This* is rather jolly." She advanced into the room. "Heavens, Nell! you don't mean to say you burn those torches?"

"Certainly I do."

"But the smoke?"

"We open the skylight a little. You would never notice the smoke."

"What do you do when it rains?"

No answer was forthcoming. Apparently

only the inner circle was destined to know what happened when it rained.

Mrs. Burnham's attention was now fixed on the skylight and its tracery of leaves.

"That 's awfully pretty, Nellie. People are always praising my original ideas, but I think that you 've got a great deal the most originality of the two."

The priestess was human. Her tone softened.

"I really had a lovely arrangement—about twenty tiny electrics scattered about on the outside of the glass. It was enchanting at night—just like stars. But in the first storm the wires broke and set the roof on fire. The landlord was so narrow-minded about it! I had to take the whole thing away," Hyacinth explained pathetically.

"He 's lucky. My landlord is my husband, and he has to stand the damages. What were you two doing? Growing your souls? If I 'm as still as a mouse, can't I sit down and listen? I 've always wanted to know how the elect talked to each other."

"I 'll tell you how, dear. In private," Margery said sweetly. Jessie laughed with entire good-humor.

"That 's a shame, because I don't know

anybody who needs to have a little of the higher life pumped into them more than I do. I 'm in a vile temper at this very moment. Kindly look at that."

She drew from her muff and held up a column torn from a morning paper. The head-lines were legible across the room.

MILLIONAIRE WILL WED

Gotham's Most Noted Bachelor Surrenders to Hymen

APPROACHING NUPTIALS OF "WILLIE" SMITH AND MISS HONOR HAMMOND

"Jessie!" cried Margery. Her dream of Tolna and Honor was a dream, indeed.

"Most of it is in the form of an interview with him. It mentions the church and the date,—next month, if you please: she is n't going to take any chances,—and the gratifying fact that he has given her the largest ruby in the world for an engagement-ring, and his patronizing intention of deeding her his house on Central Park East and his estate in Carolina. Is n't that ingratitude? Why, girls, I made that fellow! I brought him up by hand, like Pip.

"When he first came to New York, away

from that ridiculous place where his father made his money, he did n't know enough to get out of the way of the trolleys. He wore a soft hat with a frock coat, and a white tie with a dinner-jacket. He did n't know the difference between ' Anheuser ' and ' Tannhäuser.' I guess he thought they were both aldermen. He ate his oysters with his salad-fork, and burred every ' r ' in his head, and never wore gloves when he should, and always had them on when he should n't, and said, ' Well, I must be going now,' and remarked to the butler, ' No, I would n't wish for any.' "

" And you probably made fun of him before guests and servants."

" I dare say I did, Ellen. I cured him, anyhow. Madge, he used to write to me on postals, answer invitations that way, and leave out all the ' I's.' And he talked about the ' drammer,' and his ' full-dress suit,' and his ' momma,' and he thought that to live at the Waldorf was ' swell,' and he 'd never had a valet in his life."

" And from such beginnings you made him the man that he is now! "

" Yes, Madge; but I used to think I never could. It was months before he stopped saying, ' Yes, 'm,' and calling luncheon, dinner.

I just rolled up my sleeves and went at his education, day in and day out, month in and month out; and just as I 've got him presentable he goes and does this!"

"The worm turns. I must say, Jessie, I sympathize with the worm—and with Honor."

"Honor Hammond! It would be better if it was anybody else. If it was anybody in my crowd—Tottie Mason or Pinky Fraser—I should hate her and she 'd hate me, but she 'd copy me and take hints from me and scramble along after me as best she could. I should be queen of her palace if I never set foot inside her doors. But you know Honor Hammond."

"I have talked to her a number of times. I don't know her in the least."

"That 's what I mean. I 've always got along perfectly well with Honor, but I 'm nothing to her. I 'm horribly afraid of her, just as everyone else is, but I won't let her know it; so I butted right in, and called her Honor, the second time I met her. She does n't mind. She calls me Jessie, but she is n't any more intimate than the Diana on the tower. If she 'd take the trouble to resent me we might be friends sometime, but she won't. And you know what kind of functions she 'll

give. Like your mother's, Margy, only more so. Just as refined and proper and dull and distinguished; only, as she will be richer and her house bigger, they will all be in proportion. Dinners of sixty covers, with Paderewski afterward. Poor Willie!"

"*I* say, 'poor Honor!'"

"Poor Honor, indeed! She has got exactly what she wants. She won't care about Willie's being a little runt. She 'll have the money, and that 's what she is after. She has n't any more human feeling than that chair."

"Once I thought she had," Margery reflected aloud. "I thought, the other night, that perhaps she was n't really as conceited as people think; only bored and tired out with being a professional beauty. You both saw how Monsieur Tolna had eyes only for her. I made up a nice little romance. He was to fall in love with her and turn her from a marble girl to a flesh-and-blood one. And now she is perfectly happy with Willie Smith, while Tolna— Oh, we 're all just misfits!"

"'It 's a mad world, my masters,'" Jessie pronounced cheerfully. "One of the maddest misfits in it is that Nell and I are sisters and

that our mother is—mother. By the way, Nellie dear, she 's almost here."

The stately Hyacinth jumped up, looking very much as if she wanted to hide under the table.

" Yes, Nell; I did n't come for my soul's good. I came to bring mother. I think I hear her step now. She stopped to order camp-chairs, while I ran ahead to spread the glad tidings. Nellie, you unfilial girl—"

Mrs. Burnham's chatter broke off as there entered a quiet little lady in elegant mourning, slender, delicate of feature, with hair just beginning to show gray threads. Thirty years ago Mrs. Lawrence had been called " the Dresden china Beauty," and she was very pretty still. She was given dignity by a deliberation of movement unusual in so small a woman, and her speech was equally deliberate, low, but so precisely enunciated that she could be heard throughout a large hall. She possessed a wide-spreading family connection, and as she mourned punctiliously for even a third cousin on her husband's side, she had not for years been seen in colors. Her black was always so dainty and becoming that not even her daughters, decrying " mother's

fads," guessed that she clung to it for economy's sake. Her husband had devoted his life to showing Westchester farmers how to make agriculture pay. From his father he had inherited an income reckoned large in the father's day, moderate in the son's. Upon this competence, Mrs. Lawrence educated her five children, kept up the indiscriminate hospitality which her husband considered a country gentleman's obligation, and paid the annual deficit of the scientific farm. If, after all this, she was able to give considerable sums to her pet charities, she proved herself a canny manager. She had one servant fewer than her neighbors, and her house looked better than theirs, while her furnace burned less coal and gave more heat than any furnace in the county. The wonderful part of it was that in none of her arrangements did she seem to scrimp.

"How do you do, Ellen?" her mother said easily, kissing her heated cheek. Margery, being perceived, was kissed also, but absently, for Mrs. Lawrence's mind was full of other matters. "My dear, that servant of yours is extremely slatternly. She has certainly worn that apron for two days, and as she says that

her month is up on Saturday, I told her you would n't need her after that. As it happens, fortunately, I have just the girl for you at home, and I shall send her down on the ten-thirty. That will give her time to make the beds for me, and she will be here to get your luncheon. She is Jane's sister, but I should not have taken her had I understood that she was so young. There is no use expecting young girls to keep steadily about their work where there are so many men about as we have on the place. However, Polly is such a good, conscientious creature that I should not feel justified in turning her off till I had found her another situation. She will be the very thing for you. She is a faithful housemaid, and beautifully neat. She is not much of a cook, but, living alone as you do, that does n't matter. And Chambers has to go in to the early train, Saturday, for some fertilizer; so that it won't be an inconvenience to get her trunk to the station."

While she spoke the arbiter of destinies made a note in the gun-metal-covered tablets on her chatelaine.

" I have no intention of taking your Polly, thank you, mother," Hyacinth answered

quietly. "I am quite satisfied with the woman I have."

"We will settle it at luncheon," said her mother, her lifted eyebrows gently rebuking the bad taste of discussing family affairs before visitors. A perfectly polite little glance at Margery inquired, "How much longer does this tactless person intend to remain?"

Hyacinth seized her friend's hand and drew her down on the bench, with an imploring:

"No, no, darling. Of course you 'll stay to luncheon."

"Yes, yes, darling. Stay and be a buffer," Jessie chimed in, taking Margery's other hand and squeezing up to her on the other end of the bench. She went on to explain softly, while Mrs. Lawrence was busy surveying the room:

"You see, Nell dare n't bluff mother too far, or mother 'll make dad stop her allowance; and mother dare n't bluff Nell too far, for fear Nell will join the Salvation Army, or turn dancing dervish and do whirls outside St. Thomas's while the congregation is coming out. So it is nip-and-tuck between them, and sometimes Nell scores, and sometimes mother. But the heaviest betting is on mother."

She jumped up, shaking out her skirts.

"Good-by for the present, beloved family. Nellie, I offered her all of my rooms. I did indeed. It would n't make me a quarter of the trouble it will make you. But she says that I am too far up-town."

Dragging Margery with her, Jessie vanished without expounding further. Mrs. Lawrence explained in her gentle voice:

"I came to borrow your room, Ellen, for my Conversion-of-the-Hindus-Society meeting. All your furniture and that tent thing will have to come out, anyway, to make room for the camp-chairs, so that they don't matter. And I dare say the walls won't be noticed much, as my maps will cover a good deal of them."

"You are welcome to my room, mother." Hyacinth's voice trembled. "But the tepee is clamped to the chimney-face. It took a carpenter two days to put it up. It can't come down without tearing the wall."

"But it occupies the space of a dozen chairs,—more, I think,—which I can't spare. I have measured the floor with my eye, and if we have a full meeting we shall need every inch of it. I would n't destroy your wall, my dear, to cause you an outlay. That would be un-

fair. But, fortunately, you need n't have the expense of putting that ugly tent up again, for I can send you the over-mantel from the dining-room at home—the handsome one, you know, with the gilt balls. Your father had it removed to put the new portrait there."

Jessie had paused in the passage to listen with wicked joy to this colloquy. But at the mention of the dining-room over-mantel indignation swept away her amusement. She clutched Margery's shoulders in her earnestness, and pushed her into the bedroom.

"Look here, Margery," she began, eagerly. "In the three years you were away, several things happened that there was no chance to talk about. I happened into Norton's life, for one. And then when you did come back, you must go to Lakewood, and Lakewood might as well be Europe, as to seeing your friends. So that I could n't tell you, and I knew Nortie would n't; but I do want you to know what an angel he is. You heard mother. Well, that over-mantel is the most awful thing. It would simply kill Nellie. But it 's just of a piece with the rest of it.

"When we girls were at home, even after I was twenty, mother would n't let us choose

a frock without her, or have any more money than our car-fares, or leave the house without saying where we were going, or ask anybody to afternoon-tea without leave. Mercy! we could n't even regulate our bureau drawers as we wanted them. She had a regular system that we must follow. Nell was a docile creature who did n't rebel even when mother broke up her love-affair—for no reason that I could ever find out. Margery, just think of it! When I was twenty-four years old I had never drawn a free breath. I was n't allowed even an opinion. Oh, of course everything was polite and proper on the surface. It has made me hate propriety, I know. What I say is that a girl is just as much a human being as a boy, and that we 'd better send missionaries to the soul-binders, and let the foot-binders alone for a while.

" Understand me, Margery; I don't undervalue mother. She 's a great woman, and according to her lights she 's a good one. It is n't her fault, because she was made so; but as a wife and mother she 's as much a misfit as the rest of us. As an enlightened despot she 's a tremendous success, and she ought to have been born to the throne of Russia in the

eighteenth century. Well, she was n't, and hence these tears.

" A couple of years ago I got to the end of my rope. I simply could not stand it any longer. I knew I'd have to run away, but positively the only opening I could think of was type-writing and a place in an office; and that was a bad lookout, too, because I can't spell. I should have preferred a hand-organ, but it would n't have been so genteel. Well, I did n't know a creature to advise me except Mr. Burnham, who was an old family friend, you know, and a great business-man, and a regular Santa Claus to us girls. So when I got a chance I took my courage in both hands and told him—not much, just enough to show him that I must have a chance to breathe, and was in dead earnest about earning my own living. And that blessed saint then and there asked me to marry him! He said he had always wanted to, but he did n't think it fair to me because he was twenty-three years older. Fair! why, I jumped at the chance; not for the freedom, nor even the money, as most people were charitable enough to say, but just for Nortie himself. And, Madge, I don't choose to take the sentimental pose in

public, but I worship the ground he walks on, and I only hope he 'll live to be a hundred."

Honest tears wet the cheek that Margery bent to kiss. Jessie brushed them away.

" Well, this is n't business; and I 've got forty things to do to-day, every one first. Oh, one thing more. I 'm awfully sorry for what I said the other night at the opera. You see, I was so badly broken by my trainers, in the beginning, that when the rein is pulled too suddenly I jib, and then—look out for spills. But really I 'd do anything for you or your mother, because you 're Nortie's people. Margy, I do hope you 'll find some little excuse for me now. People call me fast and Nell crazy. We both ran wild, I know; but do you wonder? "

Not waiting for an answer, she whirled back to the door of the " wood."

" Nellie, don't you let yourself be trampled on. If mother stops your allowance, we 'll give you one."

CHAPTER X

THE CATASTROPHE

TO Maurice's thinking, the incident was closed. Nothing further on the subject ought to be said, or could be said. But next morning Denys returned to the charge, earnest, eloquent, imploring, as certain of the righteousness and feasibility of his scheme as ever. The Irish-French strain raced in his veins, urging him on to a chimerical self-immolation. From room to room, from hour to hour, he pursued his victim, pleading his cause with a fervor only heated by opposition. Ninety-nine days out of a hundred Denys was the pleasantest of comrades, the most tactful of housemates. But when, on the hundredth day, one of his sudden fanaticisms obsessed him, the tongues of men and of angels could not persuade him away from it. Finally, at luncheon, when, from grape-fruit to demi-tasse, he had hurled his fire against the blank

wall of Maurice's silence, exasperation drove his victim to a last protest.

"Oh, drop it, Denny! What is the use? You and I see things too differently even to understand each other, let alone convince each other. What appears to you pure nobility seems to me pure nonsense, and rather revolting nonsense at that. Call me a hopeless clod, and resign yourself."

"I call myself the hopeless clod. If I could speak to you as my conviction would, but my dull tongue cannot, I could make you know what is right as I know it myself."

"Denys, if you really think it a golden deed for a man to marry a woman he does n't love, for the sake of her happiness,—which of course no living man would do, or make her happy if he did do—"

"I do call it a golden deed—a service a man might be proud to give his life to! I am no saint or hero, but I would do it and feel that I crowned my life!"

"In that case, Denys, your duty is plain. You know a good, unselfish woman deserving of all happiness. She is not precisely beautiful, she is not precisely young; but that only makes her need of sunshine the greater, your sacrifice the nobler. Think of Miss Banks,

middle-aged and lonely, eking out a scanty living by type-writing your verses at three cents a sheet! Think of her ease and happiness as Mrs. Denys Alden!"

Denys pushed back his chair and strode into the hall without a word. Maurice followed, chuckling. "The suggestion does n't seem to appeal to you?"

"The cases are in no way parallel."

"They are precisely parallel. True, the little lady has many attractions. As you happen to be in love with her, you think that makes a difference. But I had just as soon propose to Miss Banks."

As always, Denys went with his star to the opera, yet one restraint his tongue knew. He would not argue with the tenor in the midst of his work. After a rather cursory inspection of Maurice's make-up, he spent his evening in the audience, which enabled the tenor to hold an unsuperintended interview with Hirt, his impresario. Denys's absence afforded opportunity also to the valet, François, who had been vainly endeavoring all day to catch his master alone. As he dressed Tolna for the second act, he burst into an incoherent tale of woe and fear—how he could not but suspect

Monsieur Aldanne (for this reason, and that, and the other) of the evil eye; how, being obliged to venture into that gentleman's room alone at night, he had made the sign of the horns for safety, and how Monsieur Aldanne had seen it and cursed him. Not for milliards—nay, more, not for love of Monsieur Tolna—would François sleep another night under the same roof with Monsieur Aldanne. He would sacrifice his month's wages, if monsieur so decreed, but stay the night—no, he could not.

"Then you need not," his master returned amiably. He recognized the difficulty as of nobody's making but his own; while François's sudden defection suited his present plans. "I will pay you here, to-night, and you may go."

"Monsieur is good. But"—anxiety again clouded François's face—"does monsieur do well to run such risk himself? It was because monsieur warned me of Monsieur Aldanne's cruelty to himself, that I first discovered Monsieur Aldanne's powers. Monsieur, perhaps, even, he does not mean harm—some who have the evil eye mean no evil, but are cursed by the devil to do evil. Monsieur, leave Monsieur Aldanne, for the love of God."

"I do leave him," Maurice solemnly answered. "Yet I go but to return. There is no safety in flight. I must return to battle the power that besets me. I must conquer it, or forever yield!"

He brought his voice from the depths, waving his arms wildly. François, his few wits overawed to numbness, meekly said, "Yes, monsieur. The wig slips, monsieur."

Never had he put on his master's street garments so quickly as at the close of that evening's performance, so hurried was he by monsieur's eager haste. Snatching his hat, his overcoat half on, Maurice turned to the door.

"François, wait till Monsieur Alden comes, and give him this note. I have n't money enough with me to pay you your wages tonight and give you the present I intend. I shall be away till Monday night. Come to the house Tuesday, and I will make it right for you."

Afraid though he was of the evil eye, François yet waited, faithful to his trust, till the night-watchman, coming to put out the lights, reported that Mr. Alden had left the place sometime before. Not for worlds would François follow him to his own house, in the

dead of night, with no Monsieur Tolna there to protect him. Bestowing the note in his vest pocket, he betook himself for shelter to his cousin the caterer.

Denys, returning from the auditorium, had been just in time to catch sight of Maurice's back disappearing through the stage door. Following, he was amazed to perceive his charge striding rapidly along Fortieth Street toward Broadway. His first impulse was to follow, so unprecedented was it for Maurice to walk, and by himself. But he knew that no harm could come of such a prank before midnight, with the theater crowds in the streets; and he, no less than Maurice, desired to be alone.

Even now, he had not resigned himself to the failure of his plan. He possessed—or was possessed by—the Napoleonic conviction that whatever he planned was not only righteousness, but fate. Such self-confidence, if own brother to genius, is at least cousin to madness. To his mind, Margery's whole future depended solely on his efforts in her behalf. It did not occur to him that if he failed her she would at least be as well off as some millions of other girls who must struggle through their love-affairs with no Denys Alden to play

providence for them. Perfectly sure of his power, he had undertaken to offer her her life's happiness on a salver. Maurice's rebellion affected him much as the oncoming waves affected King Canute. Disbelieving his own senses, he declared that this thing could not be.

Ever since he had adopted his ward, he had received from him unquestioning obedience. He had rescued the orphaned lad from the necessity of becoming somebody's errand-boy; he had fed and clothed and educated him, and fitted him for a well-paying profession. To Maurice it was obvious from the first that he was bound to make a return of diligence in the studies his friend decreed. Only a slob (his own perhaps too forcible word) would try to shirk such an obligation. Later, when they were no longer man and boy, but men together, no large point of issue had ever arisen between them, and on small points it was always Maurice who yielded. Details—the hour of a meal, the shade of a costume, the date of a journey—were matters of great consequence to Denys, of great indifference to Maurice, who fell into his friend's busy arrangements as a matter of course. To Denys it was a matter of course that Telemachus

should continue to be guided by the larger experience and wisdom of his Mentor. He had affirmed that loss of faith in Tolna would whirl the solid earth from under Margery. Whatever the truth about Margery, the phrase very accurately described his own sensations. The world seemed topsyturvy to him. If Maurice could fail him, what was left to believe in?

Entering his own house with his latch-key, he found a bright fire in the library, the easy-chairs drawn up by the little supper-table, the two smoking-jackets laid out. That Maurice was not there caused Denys no uneasiness, as the automobile would naturally have beaten the pedestrian home. To escape further talk, he betook himself immediately to bed, where he lay broad awake, listening like an anxious wife for the closing of the front door.

It seemed to him that Maurice was taking an unconscionable time to walk the half-dozen blocks between the opera-house and home, but he reflected that any unmeasured period of waiting appears much longer than it is. At length he heard soft steps on the stairs, whispering in the hall. Relieved in mind that Maurice and the valet were come, he was settling himself to sleep when he recognized

the voices of the two Japanese servants, and called out to know what they did.

"I sink gentlemens no come," the boy explained, in a bright tone of satisfaction that his masters were returned. "Nobody ring for me, nobody make noise—Gichera frightened."

"What time is it, Gichera?"

"Tsoo o'cock."

It was indeed after two, as Denys's hastily struck match showed him. Jumping up, he ran from room to room, from floor to floor, flashing on all the lights and crying on "Maurice! Maurice!"

Till the search proved it, he could not believe that the boy was not sulking somewhere in the house. It had never once occurred to him—such is the force of routine—that Maurice would not come straight home. In all their working seasons, he had never spent a night away from his warder. He was not a man, he was a Voice, and a Voice may no more expose itself than a diamond may be left lying on the sidewalk. The mother of a young daughter whom she has guarded and sheltered every moment of her innocent life, suddenly faced with the girl's disappearance, might feel as Denys felt. Flinging on his clothes, he bade the frightened boys heat water

and blankets and keep strict lookout for their master, while he himself dashed out into the night.

Every other emotion was forgotten in his fear for the Voice. The mildest antic, innocence itself in any other man, became a crime when attempted by the tenor. Denys's own experience made him hysterically careful of Tolna's throat. He was prepared to see the slightest cold seal up that spring of melody. Had the delinquent appeared now, he would have been welcomed like the prodigal; not one reproach, not one paternal question, though undoubtedly, if his throat showed no sign of damage next morning, he would have paid for the night's fright.

The opera-house was locked and deserted. Blankly regarding the pile, Denys could not imagine why he had not expected this.

"I must be going crazy," he told himself, pushing back the elf-lock, which instantly fell forward again.

Then began what he knew should have begun two hours ago, a search of the whole neighborhood, from the most dazzling restaurant of Broadway to the cheapest all-night house of Sixth Avenue. He even made his resolute way through the side-doors of sa-

loons, wherever a beam of light or a murmur of voices defied the law. So often he followed misleading clues that he seemed to himself a new Flying Dutchman, fated to beat forever the shores of the Tenderloin, as doggedly, as fruitlessly, as Vanderdecken the Cape of Good Hope. Of the two, he thought Vanderdecken's quest the lighter. He felt as if he had spent all his past and was doomed to spend all his future walking in and out of phantom restaurants and lifeless concert-halls.

Everything grew mechanical, unreal. Everywhere the patrons of these halls of entertainment were neither entertained nor entertaining, but jaded, spiritless, automatic, like the shadowy figures of some oppressive dream. As he moved quickly down the long rooms and quickly out again, scanning the faces, the faces in their turn scanned him, not with his curiosity, but with comprehending incuriousness. They had seen too many searches for the wayward to be interested in this.

One slight excitement Denys did provide for the blasé Tenderloin. It was very late now—almost the black hour before dawn. Men and women who owned a shelter had sought it. The early milk-wagons, the early

shifts for the factories, were not yet stirring. It was the dead hour, if any great city really reckons one.

In a small Seventh Avenue all-night eating-house he found a lingering handful of men, some supping, some breakfasting, some, perhaps, with no other place to go to, stolidly waiting for dawn. His eye flew to a table at the back of the room, over which hung the heavy head of a tall man with a mop of brown hair. Denys was down the room in two strides, his pouncing hand on the man's shoulder.

The fellow sprang to his feet, overturning his chair. In one bound he stood planted against the wall six feet away, shaking like a leaf, his wild eyes on the new-comer, his labored breath coming in gasps, his hand fumbling in his pocket, helpless to draw the pistol it sought for.

"I beg your pardon," apologized Denys. "I took you for a friend of mine."

He expected an avalanche of curses, but as the reprieve penetrated the man's dulled brain, with a quivering, animal cry he dropped on a seat and lapsed into the coma from which he had been startled.

Denys went out as unconcernedly as if he had not seen a human being frightened out of

all likeness to humanity. He never even wondered what the wretch had feared.

For the twentieth time he looked at his watch and then mechanically boarded a Thirty-fourth Street car for home, sickened not more with the sights of the night than with the stupidity that had sought Maurice in such places or company. Though he professed to pine for liberty, Tolna had never evinced a desire for license. Indeed, his half-humorous complaints of the slavery of his life Denys had always taken as wholly humorous, that enthusiast being unable to perceive that the life of a musician could have drawbacks. The more he pondered the matter in the corner of the empty car, not with the excitement of his first fright, but with mature deliberation and in the light of his knowledge of Maurice, the less reason there seemed to suppose the disappearance intentional. The tenor was punctilio itself in never disappointing an audience. He was to sing on Saturday. It would be absolutely unlike him to risk a hoarseness now. He could not have gone to supper or to spend the night with a friend, for he knew no one in New York. Reluctantly, shudderingly, Denys was led to the hideous conviction of foul play.

CHAPTER XI

MISS FANNING MAKES A NEW FRIEND

MISS FANNING stood in her den, the big, untidy room at the top of the house, where she worked at her violin and played at painting, modeling, wood-carving, pyrography, and bookbinding, to all of which arts she brought fitful enthusiasms, little knowledge, but much force and originality in execution. She was holding doubtfully in her hand a card on which was written the name of Morris Fordham.

"Did he seem like a book-agent, Annie?"

"Oh, no, miss. He 's a gentleman." The maid repudiated the suggestion almost with horror.

Margery smiled a little, thinking that her notion of a gentleman might differ from Annie's, but she had curiosity enough to send her down-stairs to inspect Annie's ideal. Her sense that it was not quite *convenable* to see a total stranger, presenting himself without

introduction or explanation, led her to assume a dignity positively repellant, as if she suspected the young man before her of being not only a book-agent, but a sneak-thief.

"Mr.—er—Fordham?" She read the name from the card, with the effect of considering it an extremely plebeian one. "You wished to see me?"

"Yes, Miss Fanning," the visitor rejoined, not at all overawed by her haughtiness. "I have had the pleasure of seeing you in your own drawing-room before, and very recently, though evidently you don't remember me."

She looked him over,—close-cropped dark head, smiling eyes, erect figure in its well-bred morning suit,—utterly puzzled by a sense of familiarity yet difference.

"Your voice seems familiar," she hesitated, "and your face—yes, I know that I have met you, but I have to confess that I can't think when or where. Surely you have never been in this house as our guest?"

He laughed out.

"It 's a reassurance to hear you say that, Miss Fanning. But don't think me rude if I contradict and insist that I had a delightful little talk with you at the musicale the other night."

Suddenly she saw what likeness had bewildered her. This man's hair was cropped like a convict's, while Tolna's had waved over his forehead and about his ears. Tolna's eyes were somber; this man's were twinkling with fun. This man's face seemed younger, squarer, possibly plainer than the distinguished Tolna's, but the likeness was remarkable. Margery started back with the intention of ringing the bell and ordering the man shown out.

"You are trying to personate Monsieur Tolna!" she accused him.

He had the effrontery to laugh again.

"I have been trying that for some years; but as my success was not satisfactory,—to me, at least,—I 've stopped now, and am personating myself, Morris Fordham."

She had nearly reached the button of the electric bell.

"Mr. Fordham, I cannot continue this interview." Though she spoke bravely, her voice shook. "You are either an impostor, or you are not responsible for what you say."

"I assure you, Miss Fanning, I 'm not a maniac," he cried, starting forward in his earnestness, before which Margery retreated against the wall, groping for the bell, not

daring to turn her frightened eyes from his face.

"Ring for the whole household, if you 're afraid of me," he exclaimed, on his side making the distance between them as wide as possible. "Miss Fanning, it did n't occur to me that my coming would scare you to death, though nothing is more natural. Please let me tell you that I *am* Tolna."

He paused a moment, looking acutely distressed; then his face cleared with a laugh.

"Miss Fanning, suppose you 've just asked, 'Je voudrais savoir qui est ce jeune homme.'" He sang Gretchen's line in comical falsetto, to break into a torrent of rapidly improvised recitative:

"I am Tolna, the ineffable Tolna:
I was born in West Ninth Street,
In the City of New York, in the
County of America.
My parents were just as American as you are,
And my name is Fordham—Morris Fordham,
by your leave.
I was boy soprano in the choir of
St. Helen's,
When Denys Alden heard me sing.
He took me abroad, and he taught me
music,

And he named me Tolna to make
me more romantic,
And this is the truth, the whole
truth,
The unclothed, ultimate, utterly congealed
Truth about Tolna!"

Mrs. Fanning's drawing-rooms were large, and he was singing almost under his breath, but every farthest corner seemed to pulsate with the marvelous voice. One almost expected to see the waves of sound, as one sees heat-waves over the sand. Margery forgot her fear, forgot her astonishment, as she listened, the acrobatics of Maurice's voice dazzling her ears as showers of fireworks dazzle the eyes.

The singer broke off, scarcely breathed.

"Miss Fanning, you do believe I 'm Tolna?"

"There are n't two such voices," she assented. Then, as the spell of the music faded, bewilderment swept over her. She dropped into a chair and stared at him in dumb astonishment.

Maurice became immeasurably cheered. This was scarcely the expression of a—what was Denys's phrase?—"a soul stricken at the

root of its being." He thought that he could have a satisfactory settlement with this girl.

"When I made my début, we thought that I 'd better have a stage-name. So Denys scoured the map of Europe till he found the province of Tolna in Hungary, and he took that because it made him think of Talma. I might have been a Rooshan, a Frenchman, or a Prooshan, but some of the newspapers assumed that I was Hungarian, and we amused ourselves making a little mystery of my nationality. I 'd been partly educated in half a dozen countries, so that it was n't easy to tell what I was in the beginning. And gradually the story grew."

"But why not proclaim yourself an American? Why not be proud to show them what an American can do?"

"Why not, indeed? I 'm sure I don't know, except that Denys is n't cosmopolitan enough to approve of his own countrymen. He thinks that a man who has the misfortune to be born an American is morally justified in any attempt to revenge himself on fate."

"But think how Americans have succeeded in opera—Nordica and Eames and—"

"And a dozen more of the only sex that in America is apotheosized. I am quoting

Denys, Miss Fanning. He maintains that, while the American girl has been exalted till her name is a synonym for wit and grace and charm the world over, nobody has ever rhapsodized over the American man. No soap-concern gives away art calendars idealizing the different types of American manhood. There is no Gibson Boy. The wretch

> "Living shall forfeit fair renown,
> And doubly dying shall go down
> To the vile dust from whence he sprung,
> Unwept, unhonored, and unsung!"

"But, Monsieur Tolna—Mr. Fordham, I mean—think what an opportunity to raise the American man out of his degraded condition! You could inspire a Fordham Art Calendar."

"Heaven forbid! At least my alias saves me that."

Margery suddenly remembered the base, mercenary wretch that Tolna was. On reconsidering her interview with Denys, she had decided to acquit him of all part or lot in Tolna's fortune-hunting. Undoubtedly that wily schemer had made poor Denys believe that he was disinterested. Remembering the misery in Denys's face, the passion in his

voice, she had a glimmering of the truth, that, believing in his friend's love, he had denied his own. She hardly dared accept this, she hoped it so much. One thing, however, was uncomfortable. Denys was incapable of anything base. Hence, of whatever fraud and self-seeking there might have been, Tolna stood convicted. In a voice all the colder because she had condescended to friendliness, she remarked:

"I must say that I don't think this sort of imposture in the least honorable."

"We began it as a joke, Miss Fanning. But I have come to agree with you. *I* should n't mind crying the truth on the house-tops."

Margery saw her chance for reprisals laid into her hand.

"But why do you begin by confiding in me?" she inquired sweetly. It was now her amiable desire that he should propose to her, that she might give him quite the worst quarter of an hour he had ever known.

He looked a little confused, and his answer hardly seemed to meet her question.

"You see, Denys's idea was that we should always keep up the pretense; make it practically true. Unfortunately, my system has al-

ready got more of Tolna than it is capable of assimilating. I 've struck for shorter hours. I have two matters of business to put through as Fordham. I don't sing again till Monday, so after the performance last night I ran away. Denys does n't know where I am, and I can enjoy being myself."

She thought it more honest than was to be expected of him thus to confess to her. But doubtless he was shrewd enough to know that he could never hope to deceive her after they were engaged.

Mr. Fordham went on rather hurriedly. "When I lived here in New York with my parents, we had the prettiest little old-fashioned red-brick house down in Ninth Street—fluted iron railing, white door with fan-light, wide balcony out of the dining-room covered with crimson rambler and wistaria, and great, deep yard with a summer-house and dove-cotes. My father died suddenly, leaving his affairs in confusion, and the house was sold at auction. Morris Fordham is going to buy it back."

She so far forgot herself as to yield to an impulse of sympathy.

"Oh, I hope they have n't taken away the dove-cotes or the climbing roses."

"Then I 've another quest, too, and the more important one. When I was a small boy, my constant playmate was a small girl who lived down the block. The house where she used to live has given way to a tall studio-building, but I intend to find her."

"You have remembered her all these years?"

"Yes." He was smiling, yet speaking with great earnestness, too. "It 's a true case of 'the girl I left behind me.'"

Margery's head spun. Was he no fortune-hunter, then? Had he never meant to propose to her? Then what was Denys about? What did it all mean?

"What did Mr. Alden come here to tell me about you?" she abruptly demanded.

"He came to tell you the truth about Tolna. He felt that he could n't impose on his intimate friends, like your mother and you, if you allowed me the honor of a personal acquaintance."

"Oh!" said Margery, slowly, the situation at last becoming rational to her. One inference stood out like a lighthouse. She bespoke him sharply: "A moment ago you would n't answer when I asked you why I was picked out to be your first confidant. If you please, why?"

"Because—Denys meant to tell you and did n't, and I—I thought—I knew he wanted you to know."

In an instant she was standing before his chair, as if to make escape impossible. He rose deferentially, as she demanded in a portentous voice:

"What has Denys Alden told you?"

"I don't understand you," he returned, without meeting her eyes.

"Monsieur Tolna, I am not altogether a dunce. There is no conceivable reason why you should come here to tell me that you are in love, unless that stupid Denys—"

A burning blush completed her meaning.

"I see that I 've made a man's mess of it when I thought I was making a star play at diplomacy," Maurice ruefully admitted.

She stamped a vehement foot.

"Did Denys Alden *tell* you that I was in love with you?"

The girl's anger blazed, but a twinkle came into the eye of the man.

"Did he tell *you* that I was in love with *you?*" he retorted.

"Yes, but I never believed it. I thought you were a fortune-hunter. *Did* he say that *I* had fallen captive to your bow and spear?"

Before her wrath Maurice's smile was turning, despite him, into a laugh.

"I 'm afraid he did."

"You need n't laugh. You should have paid me the compliment of thinking that I might not be an absolute fool, before you rushed here to assure me that you could n't reciprocate my—my devotion."

Maurice's last shred of self-control gave way. He leaned against the column of the mantelpiece, with peal on peal of laughter.

"I c-can't help it," he gasped. "You ought to be apologized to. Oh, I do apologize, Miss Fanning. But the whole thing 's too ridiculous!"

To her surprise, she found herself helplessly joining the laughter.

"I did come here to tell you as gently as possible that I could n't reciprocate your devotion," Maurice choked and gurgled. "Meantime you were 'laying' to scalp me for a fortune-hunter. But none of that 's as funny as Denys. Oh, Denny, Denny!"

Since it was impossible to be angry at a man with whom she had laughed hysterically, her ire veered to Denys.

"What did Denys Alden mean by telling me that you loved me?"

"What did he mean by telling *me* you had said you loved me?"

She flushed, hesitated, and at length exclaimed:

"I could tell you a lie, but I can't. I simply can't tell you the truth, but I simply must. I would rather you knew me for the simpleton I am than think me the kind of simpleton I 'm not. For I never was in the least smitten with you."

"How you do rub that in!"

"I have to, when you take such pains to explain that you never fancied me." Her smile faded to leave a face of pure distress. "Oh, Mr. Fordham, you won't tell Denys what I 'm going to say to you?"

"I will tell nobody, Miss Fanning. But don't say it if you feel apprehensive."

"I want to tell you, if you will let me. You see, I—I felt pretty sure that Denys cared for me."

"I never knew a man to be so absolutely daft and imbecile about a woman as Denys is about you."

"We were talking of you, and he was trying to find out what I thought of you, and I had teased him, but I had n't meant to make him seriously jealous. Suddenly he burst out,

in a perfectly agonized sort of way, 'Margery, won't you answer me?' Of course, I thought he meant did I care for him, Mr. Fordham, he was so wrought up about it; and I said that he must know. Then he came back in the calmest, most satisfied voice, 'I congratulate Maurice.' How could he say that so easily if he loves me himself?"

"Because he 's dead game. He believed that you and I had fallen in love, and he was n't going to have us suspect what we had done to him. But he is bound up in you, Miss Fanning. I 've known it always, and yesterday he told me so himself. I dragged it out of him. And besides, nobody but a man who adores you could contrive to give you so much pain."

"It was pretty bad when I thought that he did n't care for me," she confessed candidly. "You 'll swear that he does?"

"More than that—I 'll bet on it."

"But when he found that he had misled me, why had n't he the courage to come himself? Why must he send you?"

"Bless you! he did n't. My coming was the unhallowed inspiration of the moment. I bolted off without telling him, to save argument. You see, Miss Fanning,"—Maurice

could laugh now over what yesterday had seemed an outrage,—" ever since he discovered your infatuation, he has been darkly resolved that I should marry you, under the name and arms of Tolna."

Margery's whole frame stiffened.

" What? He has been urging me on a man who did n't want me? Of all gross, hideous, revolting things to do—"

" Oh, my prophetic soul! I warned him that you had a temper. Why, you little spitfire, it was nothing of the kind." She had but expressed his own opinion of yesterday, but that some one else should assail Denys was not to be borne. " Denys loves you so much that he can't consider anything but your happiness. He puts himself out of court. Do you suppose he *enjoyed* the thought of your marrying me? "

" I shall never forgive him."

" You 'd better. You 'll never find any one else who loves you a tenth part as much."

There was a pause. Finally she said:

" I wish I had a brother."

" I 'm afraid you would n't stand his cheek as amiably as you stand mine. But I 'll give you one bit of brotherly counsel. There is n't a man in the world, however brilliant or tact-

ful or devoted he may be, that won't occasionally perpetrate something so coarse and stupid that a woman wants to kill him,—or ought to want to,—like my telling you how Denys was determined to give away the bride! I thought, of course, you 'd laugh. We 're always doing it. You just have to go into a nunnery, or else put up with us."

"I 'm going into a nunnery. How else can I possibly get out of this situation? I let Denys go on thinking that it was you because it was the only way to keep him from knowing that it was he. When he finds it is n't you, he will know that I must have meant him. He will see that I answered before I was asked. Do you suppose I will let him think that? I 'd die first!"

He contemplated the case thoughtfully.

"Then die it is."

"You mean that he is bound to find out? He won't, for we are going to Japan on the next steamer. We shall stay a year or two, till I know that he is back in Europe. Mr. Fordham, I told you what I felt, because I had to, and somehow with you I don't mind. But, Mr. Fordham, I mean it. I will die before I 'll have him know."

He looked much perturbed.

"I won't tell him, Miss Fanning. I can't, if you forbid me. But you 're not serious in meaning to put half the world between you and the best fellow in it? If he had n't stated his proposition in three words, he had stated it in actions, time and again. You knew it six months ago, and you would n't let him speak. Surely you won't torture him for a silly little point of false pride?"

She said nothing. He hesitated, then went on:

"Miss Fanning, I suppose you 'll be affronted if I say that your point of view seems to me ridiculous. What disgrace is there in giving more than you think you have received or giving sooner? What is that but a splendid generosity? You can't dole out love on requisition, as a stingy housewife doles out sugar and tea. Why, it is n't even a false pride on your part that bids me hold my tongue. It 's a poor little old-fashioned, conventional vanity. Just realizing what that dear fellow is, ought to have knocked it out of you by this time. When you women really want to escape your gratuitous heartaches, you 'll bring your sentimental codes up to date."

Having shot his bolt, he was rather frightened.

Flushing and paling, she stood long silent, her eyes on the floor. At length she vouchsafed:

"Well, I—we won't leave town till next week."

"That 's a nice girl!" he cried, wringing her hand. She smiled.

"There must be some good in Denys Alden —he has made such a friend."

"*Some* good? He 's the best chap going, heart and head both. Oh, you 'll see. Will you forgive me, too?"

"I did n't say that I had forgiven him. As for you, you can come to tea on Sunday and tell me more about your girl."

CHAPTER XII

MISS HAMMOND FINDS AN OLD FRIEND

FOR the first time since her school-days, Honor Hammond felt contented and happy. She had accomplished her destiny, and she felt the exhilarating consciousness of achievement. It was not precisely Willie's money that elated her. It was the feat of having secured Willie's money. She had won her spurs. No longer need she fear the world; she had earned her peace. That she was not in love with the man of her choice troubled her not at all. She understood that love was the most delightful of emotions, as she had been given to understand that the mango was the most delicious of fruits, but one seemed as little a necessity in her life as the other. She basked in the consciousness that her mother thoroughly approved her, and that her world admired and envied her. Her radiant face could maintain its radiance even through Willoughby's visits. In truth, he had not yet

become to her an individual. If, before his proposal, he had been merely a bit of background, since that moment he was a symbol, something that stood for freedom, power, consequence. The man himself was vague to her; she could not have told the color of his eyes. If his hair had turned gray overnight, she would hardly have noticed it.

One afternoon, a few days after her engagement, it happened that she was alone in the house. Her mother was having a session with their dressmaker, of almost sacred privacy.

Willoughby had gone up to Tarrytown to see "momma." None of the girls had run in to talk over the engagement. Nobody ever did run in on Miss Hammond. But Honor was used to solitude and preferred it. She was rather sorry when it was time to follow her mother and accompany her to their quota of teas.

As she came down-stairs she found the diminutive buttons—Mrs. Hammond's economical concession to the World-Idea of a footman—just opening the door.

"Is your master at home?" a man's well-bred voice inquired. "Mr.—Mr.—"

"No, sir," the buttons answered. "Nobody 's in but Miss Honor." Stepping back from the door, the boy shifted all responsibility to her shoulders.

She was at the entrance now, facing the stranger.

"You?" he cried. "Do *you* live here?"

She supposed him to be one of the many men she had danced with, though she recalled his face but vaguely. Never quick in social emergencies, she stood waiting for him to explain his errand.

"Don't you know me, Honor?"

The tone of his voice made her think of Jefferson's "Don't you know me, Meenie?" Association of ideas suddenly gave her the clue to answer confidently:

"Yes. You are Monsieur Tolna."

It seemed sufficiently extraordinary that Monsieur Tolna should come to her house, yet be amazed that she lived there; should be calling her Honor, yet look hurt and disappointed when she recognized him. But, as often happens with shy persons, self-possession returned to her when she discovered that he was even more unequal to the emergency than she, and in his turn was staring at her,

helpless and distressed, without moving or speaking. She smiled hospitably.

"Monsieur Tolna, are n't you coming in? Tell Peters to drive up and down awhile, David."

Beyond the pretty drawing-room with its spindle-legged chairs and claw-footed cabinets and walls hung with miniatures, past the pretty dining-room with its Sheraton low-boys and high-boys and old samplers, was a sitting-room at the back of the house, through whose French windows, opening on a wide balcony, the sun poured all day long.

This room was not conscientiously Colonial, like the others. Chairs, tables, and book-cases were of the black walnut of thirty years ago, which, in this sunny room with its white paint, looked less funereal than black walnut generally contrives to do. The simply designed chairs, picked out with lines of faded gilt, bore covers in the cross-stitch tapestry of an earlier generation, most beautifully toned by time to softest olives, pallid blues, and ghostly pinks. Both heavy Brussels carpet and embossed wall-paper, once gay with large pink roses, were now dimmed to the same soft shell-color, while the brilliant note in the room was sup-

plied by the scores of blossoming plants which, on antiquated terraced stands of twisted wire, banked the wide windows. Stately steel-engravings of noble Old-World buildings and bridges and of Raphael's masterpieces crowded the walls, though, by some seeming inadvertence, one or two oil portraits and a few frivolous water-colors, with half a dozen still more frivolous French chromos, had managed to push themselves in. Flanking the large gilt clock on the mantel smirked two Dresden china shepherdesses, while beyond each posed a self-conscious "Rogers group." Old-fashioned without being antique, the whole was a jumble of incongruous parts that violated every rule of house decoration.

Most women with Mrs. Hammond's true artistic sense would have sent everything to auction and "done over" the room in the mode of some French king, or English queen, or Turkish vizier, or Spanish missionary. But that competent lady was clever enough to discern the meaning of the conglomerate—the misguided but sincere struggle of the '70's to realize an ideal. When she saw fit she could soar above the realm of "smug routine and things allowed," and she both perceived

and respected the homely, livable, average-man's-taste look of the place, which her elegant drawing-room very properly lacked. She had bought the furniture with the house, at a price which enabled her to sell most of it at a profit. But this one room had been left almost as she found it. Here papers and magazines and sewing might litter tables or floor, and here might come the friends who were subtle enough to appreciate her appreciation.

With an unconscious sense of the fitness of things, Honor led the visitor not to the impersonal drawing-room, but at once to this more intimate retreat. It had not occurred to her to think him an impostor, to feel afraid of him; and though she could not guess the meaning of his visit, she assumed that it must imply business of importance.

"If you wished to see my father," she ventured, "he is never at home before six;" and then she waited for him to disclose his errand.

But he was neither looking at her nor listening, in his absorption with the room itself. His glance, traveling swiftly, yet seemed to take in everything before he strode to the window to stare into the yard. Then he turned back to study in detail, it appeared,

each commonplace object. When at last he met her gaze she was astonished to see tears in his eyes.

"Nothing has been changed—nothing!" he cried, with an almost passionate wonder and pleasure.

"Why, what—how can you know?" she stammered.

He came close to her.

"Honor—dear, don't you remember me now?"

She was white as a sheet.

"I saw the resemblance the first moment you came on the stage. But you were Hungarian. Your whole history was known. Oh, I thought that if it were you, you would make some sign. I was afraid to. I knew it could n't be true. It could n't!"

"But it is true, Honor bright."

She stretched out both hands to him.

"You really are—Bim?"

"Why, dear, you 're crying!"

"But you can't be real. You 're a dear ghost."

He drew her to him and kissed her cheek. She flung an arm around his neck.

"Bim! You 're just the same!"

"Just the same, Honor."

Her face hidden in his neck, she was shaking with hard, dry sobs. Maurice fell to kissing her hair.

"Why, Honor! Why, dearie, do you care so much?"

"Oh, Bim, you don't know!"

Suddenly she withdrew from him, not with any embarrassment, but to look at him better.

"But oh, Bim, after all that you have done you can't be the same!"

"Just the same old Morry Fordham. All that Tolna nonsense is less than nothing. I 'm your old Bim."

She brushed the tears from her eyes, smiling.

"You *are* real. I thought you were a beloved ghost from those happy old days. Oh, Morry, it can't be that those old times can come again. Those happy times! Oh, it 's too good to be true!"

"They can come, if you say the word. I'm just the same. But you—"

She gave him both her hands.

"You doubt *my* wanting them back? Why, Morry, they 're the only good times of my life."

"How about Willoughby Smith?"

"Oh, I beg his pardon! I have had one good time—when he asked me to marry him."

"You 're happy to be engaged to him?"

He might have asked her, "Do you like roast beef?" so casual seemed the question. She replied as simply:

"Oh, yes. You don't know how horrid things have been."

"Tell me. Tell me everything about yourself."

She sat down by the book-strewn center-table, motioning him to a place on the other side and pushing the lamp back that she might see him better.

"Don't let 's talk about me. I want to hear of all your wonderful success."

"I 've only been singing for my supper. I want to hear about you. I 've never known anything of you since that little letter saying you were going to the convent and could n't write to me any more. You must have been twelve years old."

"I have been at home again five years."

"I wrote you when you were nineteen and I supposed that you were old enough to be through with the convent."

"I never had the letter. We were travel-

ing that year. Was that why you did n't come to see me here? More likely you had forgotten all about me."

"No, never that. But you had grown up into a famous beauty. I was afraid to meet you—afraid that I should n't see any trace of my old playmate."

"And perhaps they had told you that I was very spoiled and proud."

He laughed. "Denys did contribute that item."

"Oh, how mean of you to believe it! But I know how you felt. I was almost sure enough that you were Morry Fordham to make some sign, only I knew that you were spoiled and proud, and would n't care a button about seeing me."

"I never regretted anything in my life as I regret not having sought you out when I first came back to New York."

She laughed happily.

"Oh, don't regret anything. All I can think of is how glad I am to see you now—too glad by far to scold you. You see, I have nobody to talk to—straight out, I mean. I tried with father the other night, but it was n't a great success."

"How about Mr. Smith?"

She seemed to have no more self-consciousness before her old playfellow than if the years had been reeled backward and she was again the child of twelve.

"I don't know him well yet. It will be different after we are married."

"Then talk to me—straight out."

"Well, I was on the other side for seven years, till I was nineteen. Mother took me traveling in the summers, and we spent one winter in Italy and one in Dresden. Then I came home, and I could n't fit in."

"I know."

"You see, I had n't really known any young people over there, except the convent girls, and they were so different from girls here. In Germany and Italy, the last years, I did n't see anybody but mother and my teachers. I was so anxious to come back to all my childhood friends. But when I did I could n't get on with them. The girls were so well dressed, and so bright, and so sure of themselves. They talked about house-parties, and clothes, and men, and I had n't a word to say to them. They had been to matinées every week of their lives since they were in their teens, and I never had seen anything but Racine and Schiller. They had their rooms papered with photo-

graphs of stars, and I did n't even know who Maude Adams was. They had college-pins and flags and sofa-cushions, and could tell you who had played or rowed for which college, every season for years. I did n't know how many men it took to make a foot-ball team.

"These were the frivolous girls. The clever ones were worse. They talked about Meredith, and Japanese prints, and whether modern life is detrimental to individual development. They understood racial characteristics in music, and the color-sense of the ancient Greeks. Because I had been educated abroad, I was supposed to have opinions. I don't think they really were very much excited about the color-sense of the Greeks—how could anybody be?—but they would insist on talking about it. They can hand you out five minutes' conversation about anything on earth. Oh, Bim, I have never learned to talk. This is a sort of miracle of Balaam's ass going on now. I never had the gift of tongues before."

"How about the men, Honor?"

"I was just as much afraid of them as I was of the girls. Either they could only talk stocks and golf, or they talked about purple

shadows and quoted Omar. I suppose there must be men in New York that do something, and know something, and are something, but you don't find them at dances and teas."

"So the doll was stuffed with sawdust? Poor little girl!"

"Perhaps you think that I did n't try? That I was just faultfinding, and would n't take trouble for people? I have been captious lately, I know; but at first I tried—oh, so hard!—to learn the jargon and keep up with the procession. I have seen girls come out of nowhere and be more royalist than the king at the end of the first week. But I 'm not bright. I 'm not self-possessed. I don't get there."

"I don't see why you let it worry you. You could be a deaf-mute if you chose. You 've been a tremendous success."

She laughed.

"Yes, in a queer way that you don't understand. I am a public character. I am a ballroom success. Men tumble over themselves for the privilege of having people see them dancing with me. But none of them would dream of coming to my house, except when asked formally to dinner. No one ever drops in to see me—men or girls. I have any num-

ber of public satellites and no private friends."

He took her hand. "I 've a fellow-feeling, Honor."

"And there is something that you won't believe, because I am so ridiculously paragraphed in the newspapers as 'one of the most admired girls in America,' and all that. But, until Willoughby Smith asked me, not a human being has ever wanted to marry me."

"The country is going to the dogs."

"There was a young painter in Florence who shot himself on the door-step. Oh, not fatally, Bim. Just a flesh-wound. Except for him and Willoughby, nobody. I think that 's queer, don't you? Most girls have a good many chances, first and last. So I realize what luck I am in to have suited Willoughby."

"You landed a big fish at last," he said absently, regarding her in a puzzled way.

"Is n't it a comfort? Mother had begun to believe not only that I should n't make the brilliant match of her dreams, but that I should n't make any match at all. I think she would have been contented with almost anybody. But this!"

As he was silent, she added, smiling:

"You see, when you introduce a daughter

with such a flourish of trumpets as mother blew over me, it is like throwing down the gauntlet to society,—offering a wager that you will do something big. To succeed is naturally a triumph."

"A great fortune like that means a lot, Honor."

"Everything! Freedom, power, leading instead of following. Oh, I 'm lucky, indeed."

She showed so beaming a face that his question seemed superfluous.

"You 're perfectly satisfied then, dear?"

She looked a little surprised that he could ask.

"Perfectly, Bim. It is n't reasonable to expect everything. It would be suprahuman if Willoughby Smith had all that money and looked like—Monsieur Tolna," she instanced, with a frank laugh absolutely devoid of coquetry.

"It would be awkward if you fell in love with somebody else afterward, would n't it?"

"It does n't seem to be—nowadays," she laughed.

Maurice hated her cynicism as one hates bad words in a baby mouth, the while he assured himself that it meant no more. Within the

shell of her radiant womanhood, her spirit seemed to him as crude and sexless as that of the child of twelve years ago. Hers was the innocent hardihood of a child. He told himself that there is a lack of sensitiveness when the feelings have been blunted and when they have never been waked. The outward effect is the same, the inner causes are worlds apart. Like many shy persons not accustomed to utter their thoughts, she had, once she let herself go, no gage of what was startling and what was not. She proclaimed her daring sentiments with no desire to produce an effect, with no consciousness that they were daring.

"I have known two girls who made brilliant marriages, who cried all night before their weddings. They both cared for somebody else. In the case of one girl I think her relatives pushed her into it, but the other girl did it of her own free choice. You see, they had both been somebodies all their lives, and they could n't bear to drop out. I think I should do just the same in their places. I could n't let a Willoughby Smith get by. So I am very lucky that there is no one for me to shed a tear over."

She mused a moment, then looked up with quick interest.

"Were you ever in love, Bim?"

"Never—in earnest. But I 'm young, and I still hope."

"You think it is worth while?"

"Yes. You see, I am not like you and royalty, who have to contract alliances. I 'm poor enough to afford luxuries. I can marry some one I like."

"Oh, I hope that you will find her very soon, Morry, if you want her."

"Thank you, Honor bright."

"But it seems a sort of pity, does n't it," she mused—"your coming, just as I 'm about to be married?" He started, but there was never more than meets the ear in anything that Honor said. "I mean that I shall be too busy to have any good of you. After the wedding, though, when we are settled in our new house, we must see a lot of you. That is, if you want to," she added, with a laugh. "I keep forgetting that you did n't come here to-day to see me—you were n't prepared to find me, even. You came to see the old house."

"How long have you lived in it, dear girl?"

"We bought it about a year after you went away. Mr. Gelbenbach failed,—there must have been a slump in pickles,—and father

always loved this house. Does this room look natural, Bim?"

"Mother's sitting-room? It is so natural that I want to cry."

"Oh, Bim dear, you ought to own the house."

"I came to-day to talk with the owner about buying it. But I love to think of your living in it, Honor."

"Ah, but I must leave it when I marry. And oh, Morry, Willoughby Smith wants to pull it down, with the three beyond, which he owns, and put up a sky-scraper. He was talking to father about it last night, and father seemed rather inclined to let it go."

"Oh, never mind the house, child. I want to talk about you."

"I have told you all about me, already."

"Honor, are you honestly glad I 've come back—"

"Glad? Why, I told father, the other night, that you were the only person in the world I had ever been really fond of."

His voice came huskily:

"Then Honor, Honor—"

The telephone bell jingled. Honor immediately became preoccupied, automatically

murmuring, "Pardon," as she hastened to obey the noisy mandate.

"Certainly," answered Maurice to the empty walls. "The victim of the telephone habit would leave his father's death-bed to answer a call."

Her voice was heard in the passage.

"Yes, immediately. I am so sorry, mother. I 've been detained. Yes, I 'll start this very minute. I 'm all ready. I am ever so sorry, dear."

In a moment she reappeared in the doorway, fastening her long fur stole as she spoke.

"Bim, I was so interested in you that I entirely forgot an appointment to meet mother. I must go, this very second. But you 'll come again very soon, won't you?"

CHAPTER XIII

MR. ALDEN'S TRIBULATIONS

THOUGH the sharp young man who looked so like and yet so unlike a "gentlemanly salesman" called himself a Confidential Agent, in him no more than in another would Denys wholly confide. Early on the Thursday morning he panted into the Private Inquiry Office, looking as if he had not slept, his elf-lock hanging over his eyes, his motions more jerky, his speech more staccato than ever. He described Maurice's departure from the Opera-House, and the concomitant disappearance of the valet. As Monsieur Tolna had neither friends nor enemies in New York, —absolutely no acquaintances outside his profession,—Mr. Alden could suggest no place to which he could have gone of his own accord, no motive for his disappearance. Most probably he had been kidnapped and was held for ransom. He must have been

lured away by a note or message purporting to come from Hirt, or from himself, Alden, and was being concealed somewhere. The valet was certainly concerned in the plot, and possibly jealousy on the part of some fellow-artist supplied the motive. Denys and the detective wallowed together in a sea of surmises and suspicions, implicating Venal Servants, Envious Rivals, and a band of Professional Criminals whose wickedness and craft surpassed the villainies to be found in the pages of "Old Sleuth." To one question the client returned his automatic answer that Monsieur Tolna spoke no English. Then, smitten by fear lest this mental reservation (he called it by no harsher name) should mislead inquiry, he hedged, stammeringly: "Oh, he may have picked up a few phrases. I don't know. I never spoke it to him." The detective closed his note-book.

"The first step, Mr. Alden, is to send in a general alarm."

"What does that mean?" asked the other, in his usual ignorance of American terms.

"Why, notify headquarters, and let them send Tolna's description to every chief of police in the country. In a criminal case like this, Mr. Alden, though you 're level-headed

enough to call in private detectives, still we 've got to have official coöperation. If we 've reason to think that a crime 's been committed and don't notify the police, where do we stand? "

To himself Denys admitted the force of the argument, yet he could not admit the assumed necessity. The police meant the newspapers; meant a full account of the rescue of Tolna; meant an almost inevitable disclosure of the imposture. And this revelation all Denys's anxiety had not yet driven him to face.

As if he read his client's thought, Mr. James Dunning went on:

" And you need more than the police—you need the newspapers. In any mysterious-disappearance case, publicity 's your best friend. I don't care how sharp a detective is, he can't be in but one place at once. But the public 's everywhere—everybody, down to the kids, reading the case, everybody watching out for suspicious-looking parties. Yes, the public's your best detective and don't cost you a cent."

" I 'm sorry that I can't agree with you," Denys returned. " But I have no confidence in the New York police. They seem to me to bungle whatever they touch. I have been

thinking the matter over all night, and I feel convinced that I am right in trusting to you, and to you alone. As for the newspapers, I should have thought it a hopeless blunder to send out a hue-and-cry and thus put the criminals on their guard."

That kidnappers who had carried off an operatic star might naturally expect him to be inquired after was a reply to this argument which occurred to Denys himself as final. He was mentally berating his own lack of expedients when the detective surprised him by accepting the case on the conditions proposed. The man seemed both shrewd and honest, and Denys left the office assuring himself that the lost would be found and that he had conducted negotiations with eminent discretion. Deny it as he might, however, he was conscious of something wrong about the whole interview, a persistent false note. Yet surely his one small reticence could do no harm. Why, he asked himself, should this not have been a satisfactory hour?

When, presently, the Confidential Agent waxed confidential to his subordinate, the explanation of Denys's vague misgiving took on definite form.

"Say, Bob, you ought t' have heard us—

him trying to make me believe that he believes there 's a case of kidnapping, and me trying to make him believe I believed it! If Tolna don't sing out his contract, Alden 's got to pony up. I got so much out of him. If Tolna 'd really disappeared he 'd have every cop in town dancing buck-and-wings on the case. But he don't even tell me anything I can work on. Just mark your Uncle Dudley's words: Tolna 's eating his little breakfast in his little bed at home, and this feller 's getting up a grand fake for the yellows.—*Kidnapped and Held for Ransom! Gallant Rescue by Mr. Alden.*—See if it ain't."

"What yer goin' to do, Jim?"

"Go ahead as if I was convinced it was all straight. We 'll come in for our pay, anyhow. If we can prove it 's a plant, we 'll squeeze Alden for fair."

Denys, entering his house in the renewed hope of finding Maurice or news of Maurice, was met by the intelligence that François had been there, packed up his clothes, and departed, whither the Japanese boy knew not. Distressed at his master's blank face, he added: "I could tell him wait, but I not know. He leave note."

Denys flashed up the stairs after Gichera, who sought on the library table a folded scrap of paper addressed in Maurice's well-known, uncompromising hand.

Wednesday night.

DEAR DENYS: As the situation at home seems a little strained, I am going away to give it a chance to relax.

Don't worry. I won't stand in drafts or get my feet wet. M.

With the curt message before him, Denys realized that all day he had expected it. He had persuaded himself that he believed in the kidnapping rather than admit that he had lost his case, that his blundering tactics had driven Maurice into voluntary hiding. He still found it incomprehensible that the boy's perverse dislike of his profession or his aversion to wooing a delightful girl should be strong enough to part him from the fame and glories of the stage. On the whole, the note made matters worse. Had Maurice really been kidnapped, it were easier to find him than if he had deliberately disappeared. If his longing for liberty had led him to forfeit his agreement, certainly he would spare no pains to elude discovery.

In his haste to escape pursuit, the star had not taken time to explain that his obscuration would be brief. Denys, always dominated by imagination in his own conduct, imagined everybody else to be made precisely like Mr. Denys Alden. Too entirely governed by his own convictions to give way to any other man's, it had not occurred to him that his attempts at conversion could drive Maurice out of the house. Now that he faced this painful consequence, his imagination supplied the fugitive with the very mood in which he himself would have fled a hated abode. He could not have departed without dramatic vows never again, while life remained to him, to let his shadow fall across its threshold.

The impulse that could sever Denys from home would sweep him at least to California, and probably to some far Pacific isle, before he drew breath. Yet even with his agonizing conviction that the flight of the singer was meant to be for all time, he cherished an unquenchable belief that Maurice would be brought back. He would be, because he must be!

His opportunity to learn the truth from François having been unluckily missed, a second chance was vouchsafed Denys in a

visit from Herr Hirt, the manager of the opera company. Though Hirt had lived in America for thirty strenuous years, as a youth he had followed the Prussian eagles to Sedan, where his bearing acquired a triumphant militarism which he had never allowed to lapse. As his tall figure, in losing its youthful slimness, had preserved its youthful erectness, his weight but made him the more imposing. With his florid complexion, his bright blue eyes, his waxed mustachios, he looked a major-general in citizen's clothes, and found his martial aspect perhaps of service in drilling a more unruly corps than any field-commander ever had to cope with. This morning he was twirling the mustachios to terrifying truculence, while an inward agitation was betrayed by the German familiarity with the Deity which interlarded his excellent English.

"Alden, what under God's heaven did Tolna mean last night—that he won't sing any more?"

Denys, hearing this declaration for the first time, was not inspired to guess that Maurice had simply declined an out-of-town engagement at the close of the present season. But even now he would not own himself beaten;

would not admit any contingency that might prevent the recapture of the culprit, and the return of him, chastened and repentant, to Hirt and to Margery.

"I don't think he means anything but overstrain," answered Denys, without a qualm, fixing his inward eye on the pachydermatous tenor. "Since your force has been so crippled by influenza he has been singing twice, and even three times, a week. In spite of his splendid constitution, he must feel it. You ought not to have billed him for Saturday's 'Faust,' but let him save himself up for 'L'Enchanteresse' on Monday."

He watched Hirt keenly. If the manager did not know of their misfortune, he had no mind to disclose it and add to his trials the impresario's profane distraction.

"Oh, Grigni is quite well enough to sing Faust," Hirt answered, with surprising readiness. Denys, who could not know that this concession had already been made to Maurice, breathed again. He had now four whole days in which to produce the runaway.

"Is he awake?" Hirt went on. "I want to settle one or two matters."

But Denys's fluent tongue was easily equal to this perplexity, and Hirt departed, con-

vinced, for the moment at least, of the wisdom of leaving Tolna's whims to his friend's management.

Had he been less eager to hurry away this dangerous visitor, Denys would doubtless have been asked his opinion on various matters concerned in the first production of "L'Enchanteresse," and would certainly have heard of Tolna's pledge to pay for his four days' holiday by singing better than ever.

While he was still felicitating himself on his fortunate riddance the telephone-bell rang. Hoping against hope to hear the jeering voice of Maurice, he turned white at the sound of Margery's soft tones—embarrassed, he thought, or perhaps anxious.

"Is it Mr. Alden?" she asked, with a shade of hesitation. "How do you do? How is —how is Monsieur Tolna?"

Too well he knew what stress of feeling had driven her to inquire. Forty-eight hours had passed since he had sworn that Maurice adored her; forty-eight hours without a sign from the impatient lover. Denys could picture her varying moods of patience and impatience; of doubt and faith; could fancy her hurt, angry, proudly silent; at last, too miserable to bear longer suspense. With an im-

pulse to shield her as well as to save himself, he answered without noticeable hesitation:

"He is not well, Miss Fanning. Nothing to worry about; just fag. The doctor advises bed for a few days."

"Did you say that he is ill in bed?"

The voice was certainly startled.

"For a few days; just a rest-cure. Don't be alarmed. The doctor prophesies that he will be a new man by next week."

"Mamma will send down some flowers," answered the voice with a curious intonation. The receiver was hung up rather abruptly, and the conversation left Denys to the pleasing conviction that in trying to spare her pride he had cruelly alarmed her. He now seemed to himself to have plumbed the depths of misery, because he could not estimate his blacker gloom had he known that Margery had come to the telephone enlightened by her interview with Maurice.

"He invents an illness to excuse Monsieur Tolna for not coming to beseech my hand," the girl reflected, half amused, half angry. "But what will he do next? Tolna sings on Monday. How can Denys keep it up? He will have to confess to me then."

She sat down, chin in hand, frowning, smil-

ing, wondering, not knowing whether to laugh, to rage, or to cry. It was certainly funny, Denys's set resolve to force on her a lover whom she did not want, who did not want her, and with whom she had a perfect understanding. Yes, forcing Monsieur Tolna on her was funny, but forcing her on Monsieur Tolna was insufferable. She had been obliged to forgive Tolna for his credulity because he was so unconcerned about it, so resolved to take the whole affair as a joke, that it was useless to attempt heroics. They would have seemed to him a still broader joke, she perceived. But Denys should be made to suffer for both. He had no right to misconceive her, or to make Tolna misconceive her, or, crowning offense of all, to fling her to Tolna in the face of the man's indifference. "Ever since he discovered your infatuation he has been resolved that I should marry you." The confession still burned in her ears. Not only her delicate sex-modesty, her sensitive girl-pride, revolted at being talked over, arranged about, accused of giving her heart unasked, but her spoiled-darling's dignity was still more fiercely alert. Sweet though her nature was, simple as her upbringing had been, she could not forget that she was Miss

Margery Fanning, a personage; only child and great heiress; pretty and clever and accomplished; very deserving of admiration and very much accustomed to receive it. Miss Fanning was not a young lady to be made ridiculous with impunity. Had Denys supposed that she had no lovers of her own sighing vainly for her, that he must drag this protesting rebel to her feet?

Since Maurice had persuaded her that flight to Japan was perhaps an undue punishment for the offense against her, and since in her heart she admitted it to be little less hard on the executioner than on the victim, she conceded that she must in the end forgive Denys. But certainly he should first do penance with sheet and candle. For a day or two not only should he be torn by jealousy of his friend, but he should endure the more exquisite pang of believing that she suffered.

To this mood of Margery's entered like a whirlwind the jimp figure and aggressive tailormadeness of Mrs. Norton Burnham.

"Thank goodness you are at home, Madge. I want you to get busy and help me."

"You look excited, Jessie. Has Uncle Norton been giving you points? Are you

raiding United States Steel? Or do you mean to set the President right?"

"Oh, I don't mind the President's going on forever. I 'm a strenuous-lifer myself. But you 're on the right track. I 'm in the wrecking business. Madge, down at Nellie's you seemed to sort of take an interest in Honor Hammond."

"I do—sort of," Margery laughed. "At least I did on Sunday night, when Monsieur Tolna seemed so struck with her. You saw it, too?"

"Well, rather!" Jessie emphasized her agreement by pounding her fist on her knee.

"And I feel almost sure—I don't know that it 's she, but I believe so—I began to like her then, and I hoped he really was interested—that Monsieur Tolna is in earnest about her. But since she has been silly enough to engage herself to Willoughby Smith—"

"That 's just the point, Madge. She 's too good for him. You and I have got to break it off."

"But I 'm not at all sure, now, that she is too good for him. Any girl who could accept that little vulgarian— Oh, I forget that he is your own peculiar, patented discovery, Jessie."

" You need n't apologize, Madge. Nobody understands the wretch better than I do. But, thank goodness, I have n't had to consider him as a possible husband. And seriously, it is n't fair to be too hard on Honor. For the last five years she has had it dinged into her that she must marry money."

" Oh, Jessie, surely the Hammonds are too well bred for that."

" They did n't bully her, of course. Very likely they did n't talk about it. But it was in the air she breathed. She could n't get away from it. May I remark that it does n't become you to sit in the seat of the scornful, my dear young friend? With everything you could wish for ever since you were born, and such a mother as yours into the bargain—my, have n't you been lucky! So just speak gently to the erring, please."

Margery laughed. " But if she had stood out for five years, why need she give in just when young Lochinvar comes in sight? The evidence is against her, Jessie."

" But we could n't expect her to fall in love with Tolna before she had said six words to him," Jessie persisted, undiverted from her point. " Or to know that he had fallen in love with her, either. But you say yourself he has—"

"No, no, *no,* my dear; I don't say so. He told me that he was in love with some one whom he knew as a little girl. And Mrs. Hammond declared that he was still a dear, unspoiled boy, or something to that effect, and he certainly looked at Honor as if he were trying to find an old likeness—"

"Why, it 's as plain as daylight, child. They two 'had paidlet i' the burn, and pu'd the gowans fine.' I can't imagine where the burn was. Honor never went to Hungary, and they did n't have 'em in Paris when I was there. And I don't know a gowan from a gooseberry. What is a gowan, you monument of a superior education? I don't believe you know, either. Never mind. Evidently they pu'd 'em in the groves of childhood, somewhere. So of course he 's in love with her, and of course we ought to help along a splendid fellow and a distinguished fellow like him."

"And incidentally, I infer, to get your stray lamb back?"

"Why, of course. Oh, I admit I have an ax to grind. I 'm still as mad as a wet hen over that engagement. The idea of giving up the Sing Sing dinner at the eleventh hour, when I 'd talked to all New York about it! It

was simply a deliberate insult to me. Yes, my motive, all sublime (I don't make any bones of it), is to dish Willoughby. But now that I 've had time to think it over, I 've the best feelings in the world toward Honor. Of course she is n't in love with Willoughby—nobody could be; and of course she could fall in love with Tolna—anybody could, with their hands tied. Now, Margery, *don't* you think that Honor would be happier with him than giving Sing Sing dinners?"

"Oh, Jessie, you are too delightful! First catch your hare. Monsieur Tolna certainly did stare at Honor. But he may not have been looking beyond her to the Little Church around the Corner."

"Ah, wait till I tell you!" Jessie retorted, with unabated enthusiasm. "Just now I was coming out of the dressmaker's, when I met Honor on the steps. I had n't seen her since the engagement was announced, so of course I congratulated her, and then I asked her if she had n't had a hard time making up her mind between Beauty and the Beast."

"Jessie, if I had n't an overweening respect for you as my aunt, I should certainly say that you are the most impertinent creature who was ever tolerated by polite society."

"Thanks, love! Honor stiffened up and

said she did n't know what I meant. I said, 'Oh, no doubt you knew what you wanted. But it must have taken fortitude to say an eternal farewell to the entrancing Tolna.' At that she laughed. 'I have n't,' she said. 'We are the best of friends. I am an hour late here because he has just been spending the afternoon with me.' Well! You could have knocked me down with a feather."

"Probably she said it to tease you."

"No; it just slipped out because she was mad at me. But it was true, for she blushed and looked as if she wished she had held her tongue. Besides, Honor is n't quick enough to make up anything. If Tolna has begun calling on her already—"

Margery's eyes danced.

"But even then, Jessie, he may n't mean matrimony. The Hammonds are poor, and we all know what these foreign counts expect."

For the first time, Mrs. Burnham looked a little dashed, though she protested valiantly:

"But he makes a big income, and he will for years to come. Why should he be a fortune-hunter? He does n't want to be supported in idleness. He 's not that kind. No, Madge; I consider him an A Number 1 match for Honor."

"But do actors make good husbands?

Ought we to encourage Honor to risk her domestic happiness with a professional singer?"

For a moment Jessie looked puzzled and discouraged. Then she pounced on her niece to give her a vigorous shaking.

"Madge, you wicked little beast, you 're just teasing me!"

"Oh, Jessie, please—please! Unhand me, tyrant, and I will confess all. If you must know, Jessie dear, I have stolen your thunder in this affair. I am even now doing my utmost, in the most dishonorable way, to separate two plighted lovers and rob a girl who has never injured me of a house on the Park, the Rajah's Rose, and millions in the bank. I have already asked Miss Hammond and Monsieur Tolna to come here on Sunday for a quiet cup of tea."

"Oh, you angel! That was why I came to you. I knew you were the only one who could get hold of him. And you 'll keep the Argus-eyed in the next room?"

"The Argus-eyed is n't even asked. The fact is—" Margery hesitated. Enjoyment of the funny side of the story impelled her to confession, but mortification prompted her to withhold part of the truth. "The fact is

that Maurus Tolna has run away from the Argus-eyed on purpose to go a-courting, and he is staying at a private hotel, under another name. And Mr. Alden does n't know where he is. I telephoned him—Mr. Alden, I mean—two or three hours ago, and he answered that Tolna was in bed with nervous prostration. Evidently he is too proud to say that his prisoner has broken jail. His voice sounded so worried. Oh, it was too absurd!"

Jessie received this intelligence in a very unusual silence which lasted at least a minute. Then she rose to her feet like a Nemesis, a steely glitter in her eye.

"Madge, I told you I 'd do anything in the world for you or Alice, and so I will. But I have n't forgiven that young man of yours for his behavior to me at the opera. I gave him fair warning. Nothing mean about me. Now you just wait. I 'll fix him!"

CHAPTER XIV

FURTHER TRIBULATIONS OF MR. ALDEN

DEAR HARRY: If you want a "scoop" I can give you one, but promise, on your honor, not to drag me into it. They say newspaper men have n't any, though.

Well, anyhow, the scoop is that the singer, Maurus Tolna, has disappeared from home, and no one —not even Denys Alden—has the faintest idea where he is. I don't know whether Alden or Hirt has been to the police, and of course if they have it is n't a scoop. But I have reason to believe that Alden will keep quiet so long as he has any hope of Tolna's coming back, which he won't. Won't come back, I mean.

Naturally, you won't believe this without proof, but I give you my word I *know* it. Go to Tolna's house and try to see him if you are afraid to take a straight tip from

Your sincere friend,
JESSIE LAWRENCE BURNHAM.

P.S. Don't spare scare-heads.
Thursday night, late.

Finding this inspiring document awaiting him when he came in on Friday afternoon, the youngest reporter on the "Palladium" reached for his hat. With shining eyes he told the city editor that he guessed he had a big thing. The city editor let him go without inquiry. The "Palladium" encouraged individual enterprise.

At the moment of Mr. Henry Mayne's arrival at his door, Denys happened to be in the hall examining a box just arrived from the florist's. Miss Fanning had spoken of sending flowers. His own name on the cover doubtless denoted her natural objection to being numbered, by a family tradesman, among the Tolna worshipers. Denys did not covet tributes meant for another man.

"Throw all that stuff away," he ordered sharply, before conscience demanded by what right he thus disposed of Maurice's property. "No, Gichera, take it to Monsieur Tolna's room," he amended.

But Gichera the curious had already lifted out of its many soft wrappings a set piece made of smilax in the form of a lyre. Evidently Miss Fanning had meant to suggest a comparison between the singer and Apollo. Denys's eyebrows rose. To him the thought was as pom-

pous as its symbol was hideous. How lamentable showed an infatuation which expressed itself in this bathos of bad taste! He would not even glance at the card, half hidden in the close leafage, lest it should bear a personal message, however formal.

Wondering over the atrocity, he did not notice the bell, and was caught by his unwelcome visitor before he could throw up a line of defense.

"Mr. Alden? I am Henry Mayne of the 'Palladium.' My editor has sent me on a matter of extreme importance."

Though the last thing desired by Denys was an interview, yet not only was he systematically courteous to all pressmen, but to-day, particularly, he foresaw that he might need their kind offices.

"Unfortunately, I am on my way to an appointment," he answered. "But I can give you five minutes, Mr. Mayne."

The journalist looked him in the eye with a confidence he did not altogether feel.

"I came to inquire concerning the disappearance of Monsieur Tolna."

Mayne had known Mrs. Burnham ever since they had made mud-pies together, and she had helped him to "scoops" more than

once. Her letter might be a practical joke —yet a practical joke which would get him into trouble with his chief was not like her good-nature. He believed her. But as she refused him any further help, he could only pretend to a knowledge which he might thus hope to gain. Mr. Alden's unmistakable start was encouraging in spite of his prompt denial.

"Exactly so," politely assented Mr. Mayne; "I am very glad to be assured that it 's a hoax. Ugly rumors are afloat, which the 'Palladium' will be happy to contradict. For our readers' satisfaction, I suppose that I may see Monsieur Tolna for a moment."

"I regret to say that it is quite impossible. Monsieur Tolna is worn out with the strain of his winter's work, and as he is soon to face his first appearance as *Roland,* his physician has ordered perfect quiet."

"No doubt a wise precaution. But I don't ask to speak with him, Mr. Alden. I simply ask to see him."

"You must yourself admit that I cannot disobey the doctor's orders, Mr. Mayne."

"Frightful old martinets, these doctors. Who is Monsieur Tolna's physician?"

"Is that any business of the 'Palladium's' readers?"

"You see," Mr. Mayne explained gently, "an explicit statement in our columns that Monsieur Tolna has just been seen in his home by our representative would at once give the lie to the reports which are certain to be circulated in the evening papers. A statement that Mr. Alden *says* that Monsieur Tolna is at home might, conceivably, not carry the same weight. A statement from Monsieur Tolna's doctor, a physician in good standing, would be conclusive."

"Will you tell me, in plain English, what are these preposterous rumors that seem to have imposed upon you?"

"I will be as open with you as you are with me, my dear sir. In one minute, if you are so disposed, you can nail them all as lies.

Denys had at first suspected that the runaway himself had taken the "Palladium" into his confidence. But in that case the journalist need not have come to him for confirmation or denial. His quick wit now assured him that some one whom the editor did not entirely trust had hinted at a sensational escapade. He replied with much earnestness:

"I should like extremely to know who discovered this mare's nest."

"Convince me that it is a mare's nest and I will tell you with the greatest pleasure."

Denys laughed.

"Most certainly not, my dear sir. It is much better business to let the 'Palladium' go ahead. Wild rumors about operatic stars do them no harm. Print whatever you like, Mr. Mayne."

"I shall print what I believe to be the truth. It is the business of the 'Palladium' to let daylight into dark corners."

Denys laughed again.

"Considering all the free advertising that Monsieur Tolna is about to secure, it would be folly to show him to you lying snugly in his bed. When the news of his disappearance is published I shall be very happy to exhibit him to all—authorized inquirers."

"And make the 'Palladium' look silly."

"How the 'Palladium' may look depends on itself."

"The 'Palladium,'" said its representative, sententiously, "never flinches in the path of duty."

"Most interesting," remarked Denys, approvingly. "Is it permitted to inquire if this Munchausen tale of yours is in pro-

cess of manufacture as a Sunday *bonne bouche?*

"In the interests of the unhappy artist, *and* of the public, we shall publish our investigations as soon as we are able to verify them to the utmost of our ability. The 'Palladium' is nothing if not conservative, Mr. Alden."

Denys laughed for the third time. "Ah, yes; I thought this meant a Sunday sensation," he affirmed.

Mr. Mayne suffered the mirth with unimpaired urbanity.

"What is the old saw about the best laugh?" he drawled; then abruptly strode over to the smilax emblem, which Gichera, hastening to leave the two gentlemen alone, had forgotten to take away. Raising the label, he read aloud Denys's name. "A green lyre. What a singularly appropriate tribute!"

As the door closed after him, Mr. Alden stood knitting his brows, vaguely trying to read a meaning into this idiotic remark, but preoccupied with more serious perplexities. Yesterday, so painfully begun, had moved as miserably on. After Hirt's visit, Denys had betaken himself to the bank where both Maurice and he kept accounts, and easily made excuse to ascertain whether Monsieur Tolna had

cashed a check that morning. It was less easy to look unconcerned when he learned that the tenor had, an hour or two earlier, drawn five thousand dollars.

"I came very near not giving it to him, Mr. Alden," the smiling teller explained. "How different he does look without his wig! I was so used to seeing him come in here with that mane of hair, and an overcoat all fur and frogs and braid, and a footman to open the door, that when a business young man with cropped hair and a reefer slipped up to the window and said, "Good morning, Mr. White," and went on to tell me how he 'd take the money—why, I was all at sea. For one thing, he hardly ever opened his mouth when you came with him, and I had no idea that he spoke such good English. Perfectly wonderful for a foreigner, is n't it? So little accent. Before I said a word he caught the expression of my eye, and he laughed and said, 'It is my long hair you miss. I 'm disguised as a private citizen to-day. But I 'll do you any number of signatures with all the old flourishes.' Of course, after I had studied his face I knew it was all right; but upon my word, if I had passed him in the street, I should n't have recognized him."

Next, Mr. Alden faced the humiliating necessity of confessing to the Confidential Agent that, unwittingly, he had misrepresented his case; the theory of kidnapping or foul play yielding to the fact that the missing man had voluntarily disappeared. No evidence having been adduced in support of this improbable tale,—Maurice's note, in English, not being admissible,—Mr. Dunning became the more assured that the whole story was an advertising swindle. His manner, thereupon, took on an impertinence which his client did not in the least understand, but which he intensely resented, ascribing it to the characteristic insolence of the American lower classes, and adding one more entry to the already long list of his native land's offenses.

Night brought him little rest; morning, no fresh hope. In vain had the vigilant Dunning watched trains and ferries. And, indeed, from the beginning had poor Denys recognized the enormous difficulty of detection when there has been no crime. To run down a band of criminals was, he quite understood, simplicity itself compared with the task of finding an inoffensive citizen who, looking, speaking, and acting like the majority of his fellows, does not choose to be found.

He well knew how Maurice's difference from the common herd had been cunningly exaggerated by careful eccentricities of dress, custom, and manner; how the boy's good looks, summed up in an admirable figure, distinguished bearing, fine eyes, finished features, and a brilliant smile, had been sublimated by picturesque clothes and picturesque description into aristocratic beauty. A mercantile Maurice, with cropped hair, ready-made garments, and a derby hat, would not noticeably diverge from the type of muscular young American at the next desk. The five thousand dollars drawn—Denys noted that there remained in bank the exact amount of the singer's forfeit if he failed to keep his remaining dates—was doubtless the capital which he meant to put into business in some one of the hundreds of prosperous cities in the United States. Like those bark-brown or lichen-green insects that safely hide themselves on stem or leaf, Maurice would be perfectly protected by his indistinguishability from the surrounding mass.

Before the impertinent advent of Mr. Mayne, Denys had been forced to admit to himself that his secret could not much longer remain secret. But the reporter, it was plain,

however his clue had been obtained, did not suspect a case of wilful disappearance. It might not yet be too late to recover Maurice before Sunday, or, if the 'Palladium's' penny-dreadful could not be forestalled, to publish, on Monday, a triumphant refutation thereof, signed by the hero of its gasconading inventions. And even in his growing distress of mind, Denys, ashamed of his capacity to do so, recognized the professional value of the publicity thus thrust upon them both. "By heaven," he groaned aloud, "I believe that I am ready to coin my heart and drop my blood for drachmas, in another sense than Brutus's. And yet I know that I would give everything I possess to get the boy back, if he should never sing another note. Dunning *must* find him!"

But so little, after all, did he hope from the detectives, that, sick at heart, he sat down at once to frame an appeal for the "personal" column of the "Herald."

M.—How can you break an agreement? Come back, and nothing further shall be said on the subject you dislike. D.

This labored production finished, he sur-

veyed it with contempt. Of course Maurice would not believe it. Maurice knew him too well to suppose that he would ever throw over Margery's happiness. Even now, he felt sure that in one frank talk he could set the matter in the proper light. He had thought of so many compelling arguments. Yet how unfold these arguments, if he could not recall the fugitive? How recall him except by pledges of immunity from the persecution which had driven him forth? Denys tore his appeal into shreds, disgusted alike with its dishonesty and its futility.

The whirring of the telephone-bell reprieved him. But his hope of a message from Maurice was checked by the sound of Margery's voice, veiled with anxiety.

"Is it Mr. Alden? Is Monsieur Tolna better?"

He seemed to himself to be blushing from head to foot at the meanness of allowing this lovely sympathy to waste itself on a delusion. But he knew that he was caught and held in the meshes of his earlier fabrications.

"Better, Miss Fanning," he constrained himself to say. "He will see you in a day or two—as soon as the doctor permits."

"Mother and I have been distressed about

you, Mr. Alden. I told her that your voice sounded anxious and tired."

Denys's heart jumped. It was much that she thought of him at all.

"I have been worried," he answered, truly enough. "But really there 's nothing to worry about. Maurice's trouble is more mental than physical. In a few days—"

"All will be well with him," Margery finished softly. She was finding it more difficult than she expected to assume the melting mood over a telephone. After a moment she went on.

"Mr. Alden, I know that you are *my* friend as well as his. Will you tell him—not from me, of course, but from yourself, or from mother—that—that he must not allow anxiety to make him ill?"

"I—Miss Fanning—I can't give that message," Denys stammered, perceiving that if he pretended to report their conversation she would expect Maurice instantly at her door. "I can't help him. He must work out his own salvation." His voice had a bitterness which he could not repress.

"You—you won't—" Margery faltered. Her voice changed. Then the sound of a stifled sob came over the wire.

He had thought her messages in bad taste, most unlike her, but now compunction smote him. It was he who was in fault, he alone, he assured himself.

"Margery, dear Margery," he cried out, against a blank wall of silence. The stricken deer had fled.

Piteously he implored Central for the connection, this time to be answered by the butler.

"I will see if Miss Fanning is at 'ome, sir. 'Oo shall I say, sir?"

Presently the same impassive voice spoke again.

"Miss Fanning regrets, sir, that she does not wish to come to the telephone at present."

Denys guessed the regret to have been inserted by the courteous Higgins. It hardly fitted the rest of the message. He had wounded and angered the girl for whom he would lay down his life. He snatched up his hat to go to her, then flung it aside again. What could he say?

Did Napoleon at St. Helena at once accept the life of a country gentleman on an isolated estate, or did his brain balk before the sentence that for him history was over? Did he for months, for years, against probability, against knowledge, look for his scattered le-

gions to reunite, to sweep Europe, to set him back on his throne? The mind of that younger Napoleon, Denys Alden, seemed not more capable of grasping the concept of defeat. He had set his will to the scheme of marrying Maurice and Margery till the determination had become an *idée fixe*. His brain refused to move in any other direction. He could not plan what he would do in case Maurice never surrendered. He could not admit, even to himself, that Maurice would not surrender.

Time wore miserably on. Even Dunning, slipping in on Saturday morning with a new list of preposterous clues, was startled out of his assurance by the haggard face confronting him, and became almost persuaded that his employer's incredible tale might prove true.

In the afternoon, and again at night, Denys's wanderings took him to the Opera-House—why, he could not have told. Once there, he skulked in corners to avoid acquaintances, and listened intently for the sound of the voice which he knew he should not hear.

Three nights of almost sleepless tossing had been followed by three days of ever growing anxiety. Finally, toward morning on the fourth day of his loss, he dropped into the

deep sleep of exhaustion, from which he was roused by a vision of Hirt standing over him, purple-faced and incoherent, brandishing a newspaper in his colleague's face, the portentous figure taking shape, at first, only as the figment of a feverish dream.

"Read that!" Hirt gasped, thrusting half a page of head-lines under Denys's startled eyes.

KIDNAPPED?

Hungarian Nightingale Disappears.

TOLNA LURED FROM OPERA-HOUSE.

One of those strange happenings in real life which put to the blush the most dramatic of fictionists transpired in our midst on Wednesday night, behind the scenes of the Metropolitan Opera-House. Monsieur Tolna (who, last December, won the first prize of an automobile in the "Palladium's" voting contest for stage favorites) was in his dressing-room at the close of the performance of "Faust," when his call-boy brought him a note. The boy, Johnny Geogahan, who resides with his parents at 5011 Tenth Avenue, states that the note was handed to him at the stage door by a shabby-looking stranger, a small dark man of foreign appearance, smooth-shaven, about forty-five years old, who seemed very nervous and excited. As he handed over the letter the boy noticed that the middle finger was missing

from his right hand. Upon reading it, Monsieur Tolna seized his hat and, without even waiting to put on the sable-lined overcoat he invariably wears, rushed out into the street and disappeared across Seventh Avenue. Besides the boy, the only other person in his dressing-room was his French valet, François Fournier. Fournier started after his master, followed by the boy. At Seventh Avenue the two men were swallowed up in the block of carriages. Johnny Geogahan, losing the trail, returned to the Opera-House to find Mr. Denys Alden, Tolna's manager, explaining to a group about the door that he could not explain Tolna's action. Mr. Alden does not seem to have made any attempt to follow him. Soon after, he went away with friends in his automobile. About this time the valet, Fournier, came back, stating that he had lost sight of Tolna. He also stated that he had been discharged.

On Friday afternoon, at 199 East Thirty-fifth Street, where Tolna lives with Manager Alden, the Japanese butler stated that Monsieur Tolna did not return home on Wednesday night, and had not yet done so. Mr. Alden denied the butler's information, stating that the missing gentleman was up-stairs in bed, suffering from nervous prostration. He refused, however, to allow the " Palladium's " representative to go up, nor would he give the name of the physician in attendance, although emphatically stating that Tolna was under medical care. No physician entered the house during the evening or

yesterday, but about ten o'clock on Saturday James L. Dunning, of Private Inquiry Office fame, was in the house for half an hour. He refused to state the nature of his business, but when asked whether he was employed to take Monsieur Tolna's temperature, admitted that he was not.

Many theories have been advanced to account for Monsieur Tolna's disappearance. As he spoke no English; lived the life of a hermit; had, as far as can be ascertained, no acquaintance in New York, a motive for intentional disappearance is far to seek. If the inevitable woman figures in the case, so far she has not betrayed herself. The discharged valet may thirst for revenge. Monsieur Tolna's ignorance of the English language may make him an easy victim to kidnappers who hold the golden-voiced songster for ransom. But it is believed that the mystery is even deeper, the plot more far-reaching. No one is more obnoxious to the crafty old man on the tottering throne of Austro-Hungary than the fervid and patriotic friend of Liberty, Maurus Tolna. The Austrian Secret Service has a long arm. Was the man with the missing finger an emissary of Francis Joseph's hate? Has the blood of the Hungarian Nightingale swelled the dark river of burnt-offerings to a tyrant's pride?"

Denys hardly knew whether to be most astonished, most angry, or most amused. In

his wildest imaginations he had not anticipated such a farrago as this.

"What amazing nonsense!" he exclaimed. "First I have made way with Maurice. Then François is nodded at. Then the Austrian secret service has done it. Am I—what is it—'an emissary of the Emperor's hate?' Pshaw! my dear fellow, only a congenital idiot would pay the slightest attention to such rubbish."

"I shall bring that lying pig here to see Tolna with his own eyes. And first I shall see him myself!"

"But the doctor says—"

"Damn the doctor! I go to Tolna now."

"I wish you could, Hirt. He isn't here. He did bolt, Wednesday night."

Hirt's ruddy face turned purple. He slapped the paper with a shaking hand.

"Then this—this—"

"Not that idiocy about a three-fingered foreigner. But he did slip out of the Opera House without my knowledge, and I have n't seen him since. I have put the best private detective in New York on the case."

"My God! Foul play?"

"No," Denys answered shortly. Out of bed by this time, he took Maurice's note from

his waistcoat pocket and handed it to Hirt, rejoicing for once in the luxury of frankness.

"So! You two had quarreled?"

"About a private matter."

"When?"

"The day before he last sang."

Every vestige of Hirt's anxiety melted into satisfaction. He saw nothing in the message to make him doubt Maurice's return.

"Did you speak with Tolna after the opera, Wednesday?" he asked.

"I did not even see him."

Hirt's eyes, still downcast on the paper, twinkled. If the quarrel antedated Maurice's pledge to sing on Monday evening, and therefore could not upset that, Hirt looked on it as an unmixed boon. He had always heartily objected to the unusual arrangement of dealing with his star through an intermediary, had always disliked the continual presence behind the scenes of an interloper—still worse, a most accomplished and highly critical interloper—not under his own sway. He had begged Maurice to remember that he was neither a prize-fighter nor a hotel, that he should need a manager; but the singer's placid refusal to sign any contract that did not specifically allow him Mr. Alden had con-

quered opposition. A quarrel between the inseparables was therefore good hearing to Hirt.

Too absorbed in his own difficulties to notice Hirt's recovered placidity, Denys explained the situation.

"He has run away in a fit of petulance, of pique. Nobody knows better than you, Hirt, the vagaries of the temperament, the lunacies that we who live with geniuses must wink at, for the sake of the genius. I am leaving nothing undone to find him, but it must be done privately. You see how necessary it is to keep this freak from public knowledge. Oh, I shall bring him back." In answer to a certain blankness in Hirt's face, his voice rose sharply. "Hirt, you don't believe that I am doing everything possible? Think how much *you* have at stake—your season ruined without him, your reputation injured, your resources impaired. Then know that his disappearance means ten times more to me."

His eager speech was rounded off by the jangle of the telephone-bell, modernity's punctuation to passion. Collecting himself with an effort to answer the call—"Central, for you, Hirt," he reported, and retreated to the register, where he stood shaking partly

with cold from the open window, partly with the intensity of his anxiety. Presently becoming aware of the icy draft, he closed the sash, got into his wadded dressing-gown, and summoned Gichera. Hirt's messages did not concern him. Nothing concerned him but the effect of this new fable on Margery.

"Is this Mr. Hirt?" a girl inquired; then, after a moment's pause, came a laughing masculine voice: "Is this Herr Hirt? I tried to call you up at the Fortieth-street shop, knowing your Sunday habits; but your secretary said that you were round at our place. I made the hello girl ask for you because I don't want Alden to get his talons on my holiday. Hirt, I thought you might possibly be upset by that 'Palladium' lunacy. And Alden can't tell you where I am because he does n't know. I 'm staying at the Savoy, under my own name—nobody on my trail, meals in my own room, hours of my own making—carefree, lazy, and generally all right. I was never in better voice in my life. I 'll sing you the nightingales off their rose-bushes to-morrow night. But don't you give me away, Hirt! I could n't get such a rest if the friend of my soul knew my street and number."

"I have told you many times that you would

do better alone—many times," Hirt answered solemnly. The voice laughed and cried, "To-morrow!" and Hirt heard the click of a receiver hung up.

He turned from the instrument to Alden shivering over the newly-lighted fire; noted the black rings around the eyes, the sharp movements, the bitten finger-nails. But he viewed this picture of misery with an appreciation untinged with pity. At last his moment had come to triumph over the Favorite, to say, "Yes, you are Monsieur Tolna's *alter ego,* his indispensable manager; but while you are frightening yourself sick over his disappearance, behold me, the humble Hirt, all the while in his secrets!" His mouth was open to utter the derisive words when he shut it with decision. After all, like the Mikado, he found that he preferred something humorous and lingering. "I go to the police," he said simply, and withdrew with the ponderous dignity of one of his own Nibelungen gods.

Had Denys had his wits about him, he might have wondered at the sudden cessation of Hirt's ravings, but his mind seemed to take no cognizance of Hirt. As he dressed mechanically, his whole being was listening for the next ring of the telephone. Last time it

had not brought his death-warrant. This time it must do so.

The day passed, however, much as yesterday had done. More false clues were brought to him to be rejected. He went out and came in almost aimlessly. It was nearly dark when the belated summons rang, and he took down the receiver, half praying for a new reprieve, half-hoping for the voice he dreaded, that at least the strain of waiting might be over.

It was, indeed, Margery.

"Oh, Mr. Alden, we have been out of town to-day. We have just heard. Of course you have seen the paper?"

"Yes, Miss Fanning; but I am glad to tell you that there is n't a word of truth in it."

"He is n't gone away? Oh, Mr. Alden, I shall ask mother to bring me down."

"But the doctor's orders—" Denys boggled miserably.

"I won't speak to him. I don't wish to see him. But don't you understand that we must have an explanation with you? You have let the whole day go by. It seems not to have occurred to you that I might feel some concern about this story—might even suffer—"

He knew very well what he suffered himself. To face her frank preference for Mau-

rice was pleasure in comparison to facing her discovery of his own deceit.

"Not that we doubt your word," Margery went on. "But for four days mother and I have expected him—in vain. Mr. Alden, either there is something dreadfully wrong about this matter, or—"

The alternative was lost in silence. Futile plans dazzled upon Denys's vision like the tangled fancies of delirium—excuses to keep her away; half-truths to account for the tenor's absence; changing possibilities which danced like will-o'-the-wisps before his fevered brain, leaving him helpless to grasp at any.

"Mr. Alden," the girl's voice repeated, "shall we come?"

"Yes, come—no, you—I—I mean— The doctor says to-morrow—I—I—" His words broke off in stammerings. Tossing back his hair in the old familiar gesture, he felt his forehead damp. A moment he stood there, feeling utterly befogged, helpless, powerless to think. Then, with a new note in his voice, he spoke into the receiver.

"Miss Fanning, wait. Don't go out. I am coming immediately to see you."

CHAPTER XV

MR. SMITH'S FIANCÉE

"NOW my notion for our own sitting-room would be something cheerful and cozy," Willie Smith pronounced. "What 's your idea, Honor?"

"I am too tired to have any ideas," the girl answered, emphasizing her indifference by retreating to the window-seat at the far end of the room.

His fiancée and her mother had lunched with Mr. Smith at Sherry's, to the interest of the whole dining-room and the consequent satisfaction of Willoughby. Afterward they had spent three weary hours tramping up and down the echoing rooms of the new palace, where Mrs. Hammond proved herself as indefatigable as admirable. An inborn genius for decorative art, trained by life with an architect, gave her a genuine predilection among many assumed ones. It was her greatest pleasure to advise the arrangement of any-

body's house. When the house was a mansion for her daughter, pleasure became rapture. Willoughby Smith's artistic theories were the despair of his architects. Mrs. Hammond could have given these exasperated gentlemen a lesson in diplomacy.

Honor had not her mother's enthusiasm for color-schemes. Indeed, she was singularly free from enthusiasms of any sort. Yet she had expected to enjoy planning the rooms that were to be hers. Unaccountably, she had not enjoyed it. An hour ago she had reached the stage of boredom where she ceased to speak unless directly questioned, and now she could not even answer with civility. She wondered, as she remembered the Rembrandts in the library, the ruby on her finger, what was the matter with her. Her emotions seemed to have been frost-bitten in her childhood.

The mother's smile covered the daughter's rudeness.

"Poor girl, she is worn out. She is n't used to thirteen reception-rooms. As for me, I could never feel fatigue of body or mind while I am planning a nest for my child—my two dear children. And then it 's an inspiration to work with you, Willoughby. So stimulating!"

If difficulties stimulate, she was quite sincere, and certainly Willoughby was gratified.

"For a fellow who 's never given the subject any study, I think I have a good many striking ideas."

"Indeed, yes," the lady agreed, again with perfect sincerity.

"Now for this room, you see, Mrs. Hammond. Down-stairs, you know, that subdued coloring, sort of classic thingumbob, is all right; but this room ought to be different."

"Such quick perception of fundamental principles!" Mrs. Hammond called the walls to witness. "Of course the formal style of your public rooms would not express the spirit of this intimate resting-place, this casket of domestic sanctities."

Honor moved uneasily, as if she found the window-seat hard.

"Rugs are all right down-stairs; of course they 're the correct thing. But I hate 'em, Mrs. Hammond; scrappy things, always sliding round. And I don't admire Oriental patterns, really. Up here I 'm going to have a handsome pile carpet. My mother 's got one in her parlor that 's about the slickest thing. Specially woven for her, with baskets of flowers on it, and no two alike. You could

put in a whole morning examining the different kinds of flowers in that pattern."

"How very ingenious! And was that one of your own ideas, Willoughby? It sounds *so* like you. I must see your mother's carpet when I return her visit. But it will take some months to weave one, won't it? Meantime there 's that superb Chinese rug you wanted a place for—that pale brown and white one. Now with walls in white, paneled with warm yellow, and those white crackle-ware jars—"

"The white paint's all right, Mrs. Hammond. I 'm with you there. But I 'm going to have a red paper—one of those heavy flocks. I always did like white paint and red paper, and since we decided on tapestry for the dining-room—"

"I believe you are right!" cried Mrs. Hammond, admiringly. "My scheme, all pale browns and yellows and creams, might be monotonous; not enough contrast in the background to set off the white jars. Instead of paneling the walls with yellow, we 'll have, as you suggest, the palest Indian red—"

"Willoughby means buggy-wheel red," Honor struck in. "I think that in just one of the rooms of his own house he might be allowed something he likes."

"I am not aware that I am having anything I don't like." Willoughby turned on his defender. "It is not very easy, let me tell you, to palm off on me anybody else's tastes. Ask Burts. I am quite as up-to-date as you or your mother, Honor, and the shade of red she mentioned is the very one I had in mind."

Mrs. Hammond laughed.

"My dear Willoughby, you and I agree much better than Honor and I. I believe she is trying to make you put forward her own barbaric fancy for gaudy wall-papers."

Soothed by this caressing speech, Willoughby could be magnanimous enough to forgive Honor's championship. He turned toward her.

"Would you like a maroon paper, Honor? Then you 've only to say so. I 'll be glad to have it, though it is n't exactly—"

"Anything you decide on will please me, Willoughby," the girl said, with a weariness of voice that robbed the words of graciousness.

Hurt in his pride of ownership, he marched over to her corner.

"I can't say that you seem to take much interest in your own house, Honor."

"Oh, yes, I do; only I 'm tired out."

"Your mother 's as fresh as paint. Well, we won't be much longer now. Then we 're going round to Munford's to look over his porcelains. He said he 'd let us in to-day —sort of private view just for us three, you see. The sale begins to-morrow, and your mother says there 'll be things there that I can't afford to miss."

Not entirely mollified by her plea of fatigue, he left Honor alone in her window, to combat Mrs. Hammond on the choice of portières. The girl was tired, bored, sulky. Existence had become unprofitable. The past was a slavery, the present a weariness, the future a desert.

And then of a sudden the wilderness blossomed. She was happy in her beauty; in her pretty clothes; delighted to be in that place; entertained by the comedy before her; glad that she was alive. The world had become illuminated by Bim's smile.

The footman announcing, "Mr. Fordham," Maurice stood a moment on the threshold, waiting for his host to turn to him, without either perceiving Honor or recognizing her mother.

"Mr. Smith, I am afraid I interrupt you," he said presently.

"I did tell you four forty-five, did n't I? That 's a fact," Willoughby answered, coming hospitably forward. "You see, I thought I 'd be free by that time, but we 've been ever since lunch going over this house. Takes time when you 're particular about having every little detail O. K. Mr. Fordham, let me make you acquainted with Mrs. Hammond, my future mother-in-law."

Honor instantly wished that she had told her mother of seeing Bim, wondering what self-consciousness had tied her tongue. Now she must either explain at an awkward moment, or hypocritically go through with an introduction.

"I wish I dared think that Mrs. Hammond remembered me," Maurice was saying, with his most winning grace. "A dozen years ago, a gawky boy who was always infesting your premises and staying to supper? After we had lost it, you bought the house that used to be ours. Now I 'm trying to persuade your husband and Mr. Smith to let me buy it back —instead of putting up a skyscraper on the lot."

Mrs. Hammond did remember Morris Fordham, and so cordially that she called Honor from her corner to remember him, too.

The girl came, with her most stonily indifferent air.

"Yes, I remember Mr. Fordham," she said, scarcely looking in his direction as she gave him her hand. "I saw him when he came the other day to look at the house."

"Morris came to the house, Honor? Why in the world did n't you tell me?"

"I don't know," Honor answered truthfully, the colorless tone of the few cold words giving to perfection the impression that Mr. Fordham's existence was too unimportant to be remembered out of his presence. It was a type of what people called "that Hammond girl's insolence." Willoughby admired it; he thought it high-bred.

While Mrs. Hammond made up for her daughter's discourtesy with profuse expressions of her former regard for Mr. Fordham's father and mother, and her pleasure in seeing the son again, Miss Hammond stood studying the pattern of the carved mantel; but no sooner had Mr. Smith taken his visitor out of the room for a moment's business discussion, than the girl wheeled around abruptly.

"Mother, I can't go to Munford's. I forgot an engagement for tea at Margery Fanning's. I shall be late as it is."

"Dear, you can't walk alone at this hour. Willoughby's brougham—"

"No. I won't use his brougham. I want the air. I am going to walk." Sweeping by her mother, she dashed down the stairs and out into the dark street.

Under the forced coldness of her bearing, for the last few minutes her whole being had been in turmoil,—ever since her flashing realization that to her, Willoughby Smith's fiancée, the appearance of Morris Fordham was the one interesting moment of the day. Since that discovery, she had scarcely known what she did or said. All her powers were concentrated on the act of speaking clearly, when merely to draw breath seemed to stifle her.

Blindly she hurried on, as if running away from a bodily peril. It was cold, and the upper reaches of Fifth Avenue were almost deserted. Across the way, the melted snow had left the park a black blot bounded by the twinkling street-lamps. Though she had never in her life walked alone after dark, she was too wrapt in her own thoughts to feel any timidity. Indeed, it was not until rapid exercise, heating her body, had somewhat cooled her mind, that she noticed foot-falls close

behind her. She slackened her pace and the following footsteps paused. She went on again swiftly, and the footsteps hastened. Safely round the Fannings' corner, she turned, rather scared under a haughty bearing, to confront Maurice.

"You!" she cried, surprise swallowed in anger at the fright he had given her.

"I saw you not far in front of me, a few blocks up the Avenue, and I followed you because I didn't like to have you out alone after dark. I 'm very sorry that I startled you."

"You did not startle me at all," Honor said grandly. "But it is a very disagreeable sensation to be dogged. Why did n't you overtake me?"

"I did n't feel encouraged to, Miss Hammond, after your reception of me."

"I never meant to be rude to you, Bim," Honor lamented. Why her manner had been frozen she could not explain. She could only protest: "Why, Bim, how could you think I could be rude to you? If I was cross, it was because I have had such a tiresome afternoon. Somehow, that house calls out all the worst of me. Indeed, Morris, you only came in for the very edge of my temper. I've been snapping Mr. Smith's head off ever since luncheon."

"When I came in, you were making studies

of the most offensive way to express rampant boredom."

"'That sulky Hammond girl,' your friend would have called me."

"With justice."

"Oh, Bim! I thought you were the one person who liked me."

"That 's why I don't like to see you misbehave. If you 're going to marry Smith, you might as well be decent about it."

"I am."

"I suppose you are happy, or you would n't do it. But you certainly are n't pleasant. If he 's giving millions, it 's only common fairness that he should get something in exchange —at least a smile."

"He gets my 'fame as a beauty,' as he puts it. That 's what he is buying with his millions. If he had wanted amiability he would never have looked twice at me."

"I yield to your superior logic.—Honor, I don't know how you stand my butting-in. If you had n't the temper of an angel, you would n't."

She laughed happily.

"I love *your* logic, Bim. But of course you can say anything you like to me. That 's what chums are for."

"I wonder if I can!" he exclaimed.

"Not now, of course, because here we are at Mrs. Fanning's, and I am going in for tea. But to-morrow, if you choose."

"I think I 'll go in, too. Miss Fanning said that this was the hour to find her disengaged, as a rule. Then I might take you home, if you don't object."

"But Tolna,—who does n't speak English, and had almost forgotten the Hammonds, and does n't go out to tea,—what shall we do with him? What would Miss Fanning think?"

"Oh, did n't I mention it? I told her the other day that I was twins. I had to, for reasons. You two are the only ones that share my guilty secret. It 's all right. May I ring?"

A swift suspicion crossed Honor's mind. She hesitated, glanced at a passing hansom, glanced at Maurice, whose smile was that of an innocent schoolboy, and nodded permission.

As they were shown into the long drawing-room on the right of the hall, Margery, radiant with pleasure, came forward to welcome them.

"Oh, this is better than good," she exclaimed in French. "Miss Hammond was so kind as to say that she would come. But you, Monsieur—"

"Fordham," laughed Maurice; "and may it be English, Miss Fanning? I did n't happen to mention my old friends the Hammonds, I think, when I came to make my courtesy call the other day? I did recall myself to Mrs. Hammond at your party, but I saw that she did n't know me from the postman. When I found a chance to introduce Morris Fordham to her this afternoon, she was so polite as to remember him and forget his early misdemeanors. So, as I met Miss Hammond just now, almost on your doorstep, I ventured to ask her to chaperon me. It 's the first time I 've ever been out to tea, though you might n't think it at my age."

"Then it must n't be the last," Margery smiled. "We are going into the little drawing-room, please, where the kettle boils."

Honor was reassured. Evidently there had been no plot to bring her there with Morry. Margery's gaiety, Bim's presence, the charming room, the light-winged talk—under these bright influences she glowed and softened like any other girl.

As Margery was pouring his second cup for Maurice, a card was brought to her.

"The library, Higgins," she directed, as she rose. "I am so sorry, Miss Hammond, but

it is an appointment. Please wait, won't you, till I come back? Then I shall have an excuse to say that I am particularly engaged. Your cup, Mr. Fordham."

With the cup, she held out to him, as if inadvertently, the visitor's card, which bore the name of Mr. Denys Alden.

Maurice almost whistled.

"Oh, may I ask one question before you go, Miss Fanning? If you had been your own grandmother, say in the 'fifties,—good old Dred Scott days,—would you have given up any poor fugitive from service or labor to his infuriated owner?"

"Never," laughed Margery. "The trembling refugee would have been safe under my roof."

Across the hall the library door closed behind her.

Honor looked puzzled.

"What an extraordinary thing to say, Morry!" She rebuked his manners with the air of one whom long affection justified. "Why should you care? You could n't have known old Mrs. Burnham?"

"No. That is why I had to ask. At the moment I was deeply interested in the work-

ings of heredity. Never mind, Honor, I am still more deeply interested in you."

"Oh, that reminds me. What was it you wished to tell me, Bim?"

He had risen and was standing by the fire, looking down at her.

"I thought you would like to know, Honor. Smith has agreed to waive his claim altogether, and let me bid for the house. It was handsome of him. He 's a pleasant fellow to do business with,—square and obliging."

"Oh, then I know that father won't stand in your way. He said that you had the first claim, when Willoughby spoke to him about it. I 'm so glad that you can get it. Will you live there, Bim, during opera seasons? Shall you sing here next year?"

"No, nor ever again," he answered, his heart jumping as her face fell. "I shall live in it all the year round, if your father will consent to sell it. I am going to leave the stage and go into business."

"Bim! Why?"

"I don't like my job."

She offered no comment till he demanded one. "Well, Honor?"

"Oh, but what a pity to give up your

career, your fame, for a commonplace commercial life!"

"Do you think so?"

"Won't every one think so?"

He went on, hardly so much answering her as thinking aloud.

"It seems strange to me that more people don't see it as I do. Denys, now. His mind does n't so much reason about things as illuminate them. He 's really inspired at times. It 's startling. And yet this public life, that to me is so tawdry, so empty, so childish—why, it satisfies his aspirations, that are ten times higher than mine. Queer go, is n't it?"

"Morry, when we recited Schiller at the convent, I remember learning, 'To the artist is entrusted the dignity of man.' I did n't know what it meant then, but I suppose that is what Mr. Alden feels."

"No doubt, but it takes a great artist to keep his head on the stage, Honor. Of course, in all careers where celebrity is the prize, swelled head is the penalty. But painting and writing and composing you can do by yourself in a corner, and there 's a good chance that, at least while you 're working, you will think more of the work itself than of the kudos it 's going to bring you. Actors

have to think of their audiences every second of their professional life. It would be wonderful if they did n't do it every second of their private life, too. No other class hangs so on newspaper praise; no class is so self-conscious, so uneasy, so little happy."

"That is n't the popular idea of the life of a public darling. I should say that no class was so envied."

"Oh, they have their great moments—even I admit that. But I think it the most pathetic life in the world. Not alone the failures, who break your heart, but the successes. They are eaten up with jealousy; with dread of slights from managers, or critics, or public; with fear of that somebody who, next week or next year, will send them to sit with the 'has-beens.' They're just weathercocks turned by the breath of the public. If the breath stops, they stop. I don't know whether you would say—Denys would—that the great moments are worth the price. Not to me."

"Don't you think that an actor *could* face the public and the newspapers, and remain unspoiled?"

"Yes, if he were a great artist and a great man."

She tried to shake off the seriousness with which she had put the question.

"But you are fleeing from temptation?" she smiled.

"No, I 'm fleeing from absence of temptation. I never was even enough of an artist to incur an artist's dangers. I could stay on the stage for fifty years and never get the big head, because all the fuss that the others care so much for seems to me beneath contempt."

"You don't call that attitude the big head?"

He laughed. "Oh, because I said that only a great man could escape from the life unspoiled? But if a man receives praise tremendously above his deserts, he must conclude either that he is a paragon or that the public is an ass."

Following her own thoughts, she asked, after a pause:

"Who do you think is happy?"

Her tone seemed to expect the answer, "No one," but he said promptly:

"Anybody who has got an aim that he believes to be just. It does n't much matter whether it is trying to save the world or to buy shoes for your children."

"That sounds simple."

"You must n't misunderstand me, Honor.

I 'm not posing as a model of the manly virtues. I have n't been unhappy on the stage, though the life exasperates me. I had my aim. I wanted to pay Denys. He supported me, and educated me, and smothered me in benefits, from the time I was fourteen. If he had n't, I must have gone to work sweeping out an office. It might have been just as well for me if I had begun with an honest broom, but the dear fellow thought that he was saving me from perdition. He could n't have done more for his own brother. I was bound to give him not only his money back,—that was the least part of it,—but a run for his money. He has had five years of fun as a star's manager, which was just what he liked. Now I think that I have earned the right to do something *I* like."

"How odd that you never have felt any of the fascination of the footlights!"

"Oh, I won't put on airs. I confess that I liked making a stir—the bouquets and the head-lines. It was all right for its little day. So was rolling a hoop. But I 'd as lief trundle a hoop, to-day, as spend my life on the stage."

"I have heard it said that actors are always children."

"They are not children, for children grow

up to be men and women. Stage folks are always copying human beings, pretending to be human beings. All that human beings are, without knowing it, actors know that they are, without being it. They have acquired every attribute of men and women, except being men and women. Honor, they 're the Missing Link."

She was heeding her own thoughts more than his words.

"Oh, it 's easy for you to give up your career. You are a man."

"Easy? Defying Denys?" He laughed. "I 'd rather face the wrath of kings, the fagot, and the sword."

"No, I don't suppose that it is easy for you, either," she reflected. "It is a good deal to give up, even if you know that it is n't the best in life—the applause and the head-lines, the being Somebody. You may be perfectly sure that something else is better, and yet it takes courage to let go what one has got. And I think it takes more courage to get out of a situation that all the world is persuaded you ought to be in. It is awfully hard to go against everybody."

For a moment she sat thinking. Maurice, admiring the ripples of her hair, the beauty of

her pose, felt no desire to interrupt her preoccupation. Presently she broke out sharply:

"I am one of your imitation persons. I 'm not real. I never do anything because I think it is worth while. Everything I do and am is according to somebody's else wishes or views or standards. There is no real me."

"But there is."

"Yes, that skulks and sulks!"

Maurice laughed and stepped toward her. As he moved she caught a glimpse of the clock behind him.

"Morry Fordham," she cried, "it is after six, and I dine out at seven. I can't wait for Miss Fanning. Will you ring and ask the butler to call a hansom, this minute? I will leave a message for her. Or you can stay and explain."

"Stay here, without you to protect me? Not I! When we go out, will you kindly keep on my right hand, so that if the library door should suddenly open— Honor, I wish we had fern-seed in our shoes to walk invisible. Now, then, we 'll take a long breath and start. Not a whisper, mind you, not a foot-fall, till Higgins shuts the door on us."

As he put her in the waiting hansom, Maurice glanced back at the library

window, where a man's shadow fell on the blind.

"Do you happen to remember," he asked her, "our being taken, as youngsters, to see 'Box and Cox.' Exit *Box,* enter *Cox?* It was a rattling good play. I can laugh now at the joke of it."

"Morry Fordham," she remonstrated, "you are just as feather-brained, to-night, as you were when you were fourteen. What made you think of 'Box and Cox' now?"

"What, indeed?" he answered, adding under his breath: "Devilish close shave, that! Ta-ta, Denny, my boy!"

CHAPTER XVI

A CONTEST

IN the Fannings' library a single lamp burned under a pale-green shade. The dim twilight seemed portentous. There might have been a death in the house, thought Denys. When Margery came in, with his card crumpled in her hand, her dress struck him as darker and severer than her wont, while her face looked pallid in the gloom. Near the door, silent, she stood waiting for him to address her.

Though his resolve had brought him immense relief, yet the moment of confession was none the less awful. His heart beat so that he could not speak. At last she said in a tremulous voice:

"You have come to explain to me."

"Yes," he answered heavily. "Yes."

She advanced a little, clenching her slender hands.

"It is something terrible," she breathed; "something overwhelming!"

Tense, expectant, she seemed to fall upon the seat of a comfortless Italian chair.

"It is something you could n't guess, something I don't know how to tell you." Denys fought for an instant's respite.

"I have guessed that it is tragedy," the girl said, still in the same restrained tones.

If it had been tragedy, he felt that he could have borne it better. It was the pettiness of the complication that overmastered him.

"Yes, if deceit is tragic, and the betrayal of friendship," he answered at last. "Margery, there is no Maurus Tolna."

She sprang to her feet.

"He is dead?"

"No; the singer, the man you know, lives and thrives. But he is not an Hungarian. He is American. His real name is Morris Fordham."

She stared at him.

"But I don't understand," she stammered. "You have told me his story—Hungary—Tolna Castle—his patriotism—his hermit life?"

"All invention."

She sank back into her chair, still staring at him.

Now that he was confessing what he had felt that he would rather die than reveal, he chose the bluntest words, with a sort of pleasure in his own anguish as he saw himself sink lower and lower in her contempt. Baldly he told her of his discovery of Maurice, of his patient training, of the boy's slangy commonplaceness, of his own device to flood this stolid dullness with the limelight of romance.

"Just a fraud on the public to get money, Margery."

Indignation lifted her to her feet.

"And what of me—when you spent hours, days, glorifying him to me?"

He groaned aloud.

"God forgive me! I never thought that it could touch you."

Her quiet sentence stung: "No, you never thought."

He lowered his face in his hands.

Presently she spoke again, with a distinct bitterness.

"Some days ago, you gave me to understand that this spotless knight, this honest gentleman, had done me the honor to seek my hand, and would wait upon us at once to plead his cause. Was that an essential part of your fraud to get money?"

It did not occur to him that this was not the

plaint of a broken heart. He raised a haggard face.

"There, at least, I was sincere, Miss Fanning. I was sure that he loved you."

Her tone was even more contemptuous.

"Till you took the decent trouble to inquire, and found that the cheater was cheated."

"I never doubted—" he stammered.

"Then you did ask him? You did report that I adored him?" she cried sharply, as if she were but now assured. "You did thrust me upon him, till to escape me he has fled. Oh, I can guess it all!"

He made no attempt to defend himself. After a moment, marshaling her grievances, she swept on:

"You forced me on him. And you called yourself my friend!"

He looked up now.

"It was indefensible, Miss Fanning. My only excuse is that I love you."

From her "You!" he winced as from a whip; but, offender as he acknowledged himself, her tone stung him out of his meek submission to her taunts.

"Yes, I. I loved you from the first moment I saw you, last summer. I almost told

you a dozen times, there in the pines, but I was afraid of that money of yours. I am not poor, but you are a great heiress. I wanted to show you first that in myself I was good for something. You loved music. I had made a musician. For I did make the singer out of Maurice, just as truly as Pan made his pipe out of a reed. I thought that when you heard him sing you would give me some poor credit. Vain fool that I was, I never foresaw that when you knew him you must love him!"

She was silent now, her play-acting abashed before his reality. In a moment he went on:

"When I found that you were under the spell, I knew that I had wrought it—beguiled you to see in him all that I had said he was. God knows that when I made up the story I meant no harm. I told it to you, as I had been telling it to the public, because I thought it would amuse you. The public likes to read picturesque tales about celebrities, and never asks whether they are true. Tolna is just a celebrity to them. I, gross egotist that I was, forgot that he could be more to you. He was to reflect glory on me. I never considered the glory piled on his own head. The night that you asked to meet him, it struck me for the

first time that you looked on him not as an abstraction, but as a man. That night I saw the beginning of the end."

She still sat silent, moved by these revelations. He repeated:

"I saw what I had done, exalting him to you, kindling your imagination. In trying —humbly enough, heaven knows—to make you think more kindly of me, I had made you adore him. Margery, what could I do but what I did do? How could I tell you, then, that Tolna was a myth? How could I belittle my friend to help my own cause? Through my duplicity, you had come to care for him. After I knew that, how could I ever confess the trick? In the beginning I honestly meant —after you should see him and be completely taken in by him—to tell you the whole thing, as a joke. Then I found that— My God! it has been a costly joke to me."

She still sat silent, her face white and drawn, he fancied, against the high, carved back of her chair. He went on:

"If I had told you, then, you would have loathed me for a trickster. You would have accused me of juggling with a woman's heart for wanton fun. Though I never meant it, that was what I had accomplished—played a

little trick for stupid fun, and ruined your life with it. Well, I vowed that your life should *not* be ruined. If I had offered you a false Tolna in jest, you should have a real one in earnest."

Her look was pure wonder.

"You meant to keep up the pretense to me?"

"I was sure that he loved you. I think nobody can look at you and not love you. I know *I* can't. I meant him to go on—as Tolna. What harm, when he really is the gentleman Tolna is believed to be?"

Denys's eloquence suddenly ceased. Margery kindly supplied the words he could not speak.

"But unfortunately he was the one invulnerable who *could* look at me and not love? When you so generously offered me to him, he declined me?"

Denys's dark cheek flushed.

"Miss Fanning, I did wrong. Nothing that you can say can make me more ashamed than I am; more sorry, more miserable. But I believed your happiness at stake. I—I—spoke to him too strongly, and he left my house."

Before the evidence of his love and suffer-

ing, Margery had already condoned his offense. Now, as he recalled his appeal to Maurice, his cheapening of her, her vanity flamed up again.

"Even then," Denys pursued, his eyes on the rug—"even then I could n't give it up. I am a little crazy, I think. I am always so sure that I can get my way, because I am always so convinced that it is the one right way. For thirteen years Maurice has been my docile ward who did as he was bid. I *knew* that he would come back and give in to me. I could not admit to you that all was wrong. I could n't break your heart. In spite of myself, I was driven to the pettiest shifts and subterfuges."

"Then even now you don't know where he is hiding—from me? Even now you fear that he is giving up his career—to escape me? And yet, even now you would persuade him to take pity on me if you could! Oh, it is monstrous!"

"Even to-day, Miss Fanning, when that vulgar newspaper has informed all the world that Maurice has disappeared—even on my way here, I wanted to tell you that he had wandered away and died in a fit of insanity brought on by overwork. I thought it would hurt you less to hear that than to hear what had really happened."

"I don't quite see why, when your reservoir of fiction is still so full, you prefer to dole out a scanty draught of truth."

He smiled. "Not for love of the article, I assure you. It was because I foresaw that Maurice might report himself, well and in his right mind."

"Even your—imagination cannot cover all contingencies."

He was surprised at the constant acerbity of her tone. Humbly as he admitted that he deserved them, he felt it beneath her dignity to deal these thrusts at him, defenseless. A great grief, to his thinking, demanded a noble expression. Passion of despair he had expected. Passion of anger and scorn he could understand. Her well-planted petty darts seemed quite incongruous with the occasion.

Then he reviled himself for dragging into this reality his stage notions of technique. Because Margery did not tear a passion to tatters, was he to assume that she did not feel? Nay, rather, if her despair found vent in sharp retorts, then thus in real life must real despair be expressed. Pity for her wrung him to the last degree of anguish.

"No words that you could say can brand me as my own condemnation brands me. When you think of the contemptible lies and evasions

with which I tried to shield you, you must know how I felt the shame of the truth, how I dreaded to tell it to you. Margery, would to God I had died before I ever began to deceive you concerning Maurice!"

He spoke theatrically,—Denys could not do otherwise,—yet she knew that his emotion was none the less true for the grandiloquence of his words. She could see in his face the haggard misery that she had meant him to imagine in her own. She felt that the jest had gone far enough. He had had his punishment, and had taken it gallantly. And now she would be gracious. She moved to the chimney and flashed on the lights. Amazed, he beheld her brilliant prettiness unworn and smiling.

"Don't you think, Mr. Alden," she teased softly and merrily, without a hint of malice, "that you take to yourself rather too much credit when you assume that your spells worked my undoing? If I were the susceptible idiot you seem determined to believe me, the prosaic Fordham might have proved as dangerous to my peace of mind as the romantic Tolna. So it is well that I never cared a straw for either of them, though you chose to assume that concealment fed on my damask cheek."

In a daze he heard her through, while she laughed into his bewildered face.

"You—you mean this?"

"Must I call a witness? There might be some friend in the drawing-room to testify to my common sense. Of course I value Monsieur Tolna as my friend and yours, but never for one moment have I been in love either with your counterfeit presentment—very counterfeit—of Tolna, or with what I have seen of Mr. Fordham—in this house."

He could not doubt the genuineness of her mirth, the ease of her voice. Yet he still seemed unable to comprehend her words.

"You let me think so!" he cried. "You let me think so!"

She winced a little. But she would not confess to Denys, as she had confessed to Maurice, the reason of her pretense.

"You are so infallible!" she laughed lightly. "Who was I to contradict you?"

He was staring straight before him.

"And I have been in hell!"

The conversation did not move as she had planned it. In her acting version of this little comedy, as soon as she had spoken the momentous words, "I never cared a straw for Tolna," he was to spring up in a transport of

joy, to cry, "Margery! At last I am free to speak for myself," and to hold out imploring arms. Instead, he sat in a stupor, and said things that sounded as vulgar as swearing.

After a moment's strained silence Denys rose and, still with a stupefied air, made his way toward the door. She watched him, too surprised to protest.

At the threshold it seemed to occur to him that a leave-taking was in order. His face, as he turned it toward her, looked sharper, more drawn than ever. She could see that only by a great effort did he keep his voice steady.

"Miss Fanning, I thank you for your disclosure. You have relieved me of a great weight. Now I can go home to my salutary discipline; to the remembrance that the fool is wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason."

Margery felt as if she were driving behind runaway horses, the situation was so entirely beyond her control.

"But you were n't a fool—" she protested.

With a scornful gesture, he swept the words away.

"A very utter fool, mademoiselle. Since you—allowed me to mistake your feelings, there are few tortures I have not been absurd

enough to suffer. I was—as of course you knew when you devised this merry jest—madly in love with you myself. I had to endure not merely the death of my own hopes, the knowledge that another was preferred—and God knows that was misery enough. I had to endure the certainty that, as I lost you, I lost also the first place in my friend's heart. And not this alone. I must see your happiness lived under my eyes—eyes that must never show jealousy or pain, lest you and he be wounded."

"But when you found that he did not care—"

"Then, still trying with my whole loyal heart to serve you, I quarreled with him, drove him from my house, passed four days of damnable torture in ignorance of his whereabouts, trying by every petty lie and shift to keep the truth from you. Oh, be content, Miss Fanning! You have not only made me wretched—you have made me ridiculous. I have not even the consolation of dignity in my abasement. I was deceived and deceiving, lied to and vainly lying, my woes fit to set the gallery in a roar. Let me congratulate you that you have been so well amused."

It was the first time in her life that any one

had ever been seriously displeased with Margery. The sensation was so surprising as to destroy her self-possession. Partially, reluctantly, she admitted Denys's point of view, perceived that the rudeness of his words was to be excused by his pain, realized that it is a questionable pastime to play with a lover's feelings. But she was too angry at being scolded to allow these palliations. She felt it as a bitter injustice that he did not take into consideration how he had made her suffer, too. That he could not know she had suffered was a mere frivolous detail.

For a bare second she was tempted to fling open the door and summon Maurice to defend her. How he could defend her, or from what, she did not ask herself; but at least his jubilant presence would be that of an ardent champion. Loyalty to the fugitive making this retaliation impossible, however, she was driven to hard words.

"A reproof for double-dealing from you!" she scoffed.

"Don't let us descend to recriminations," he begged. "Good afternoon, Miss Fanning."

She could not let him go with this maddeningly superior air.

"Mr. Alden!" she cried, taking a step after him.

He turned on the threshold to say in an easy, conversational tone:

"Do you know, I am so dense that not till this moment have I perceived the significance of your kind present to me. The pun was as neat, Miss Fanning, as the gift was refined."

Before she could ask the meaning of his enigmatical farewell—of what sounded to her like a new accusation—he was gone.

She had forgiven him what his friend had pronounced a mere hurt to her vanity. But she knew that he could not forgive her for the cruel wound she had dealt to his love and his faith. And she was so young, and life was so long! She was wondering whether she could drag herself up-stairs, out of sight, when she remembered her guests. That the drawing-room was empty was the only welcome discovery that the hour had brought.

CHAPTER XVII

MISS HAMMOND FINDS HERSELF

THAT member of the Hammond family who knew least of its concerns was approaching his house after midnight, when the door opened to let out a hooded female figure. Quickening his pace to see which of the maids was this night-prowler, Hammond found himself face to face with his own daughter.

For the moment he was too startled for speech. But Honor was no more surprised or abashed than if it had been one o'clock in the afternoon instead of one in the morning.

"I am going to post a letter."

She was brushing past him, forgetting him almost before she finished the sentence. Her whole soul was at the letter-box on the corner. Her father perceived that if she had met a hippogriff, she would have walked straight by in perfect unconcern.

He felt as if she were a sleep-walker whom he must not startle.

"Run back indoors, dear. I 'll post the letter."

She made a gesture of impatience, as if she hardly heard what he said, merely resented the obstacle in her path.

"No, I must post it myself."

"Come, then," he said, turning in the direction she faced.

She made neither assent nor objection, and they walked nearly to Sixth Avenue in silence. Then she stopped and looked at him, as if for the first time realizing who he was and what he was doing.

"Father, you don't ask any questions."

"I assume that it is n't your habit to sally out alone in the middle of the night. If you do it now, it must seem to you necessary, so I won't scold you for imprudence."

She showed her letter.

"I am breaking my engagement."

"What has Smith done?"

"He has given mother and me everything we want. But I can't marry him, dear."

By the electric light on the street corner he studied her face.

"Honor, you are taking a momentous step."

"Yes, father."

"I want you to come back to the house with

me and talk it over. After our discussion, if you are still resolved on breaking with Smith, you shall post the letter yourself."

"Dad, I did n't mean to be rude when I would n't let you do it. Of course I did n't suspect you of a wish to suppress it. Only, I could n't feel that the deed was done unless I heard the letter thud down in the box."

"Will you take an hour to think about it, Honor?"

"Yes, dad. I 'll listen to anything you have to say."

"Thank you, dear."

As they retraced their steps, she slipped her arm through his, her hand into his.

"Daddy, I love you."

"Do you, sweetheart?"

"Yes. You must think I am insane, but you treat me just as if I were sane and my judgment were to be respected. You don't know how I want to post that letter. A regiment of soldiers would n't have stopped me, but when you are so quiet and kind I have to stop—for you."

Honor opened the door with a latch-key, and laid her fingers on her father's lips as she led him along the dark hall and into the morning-room. He struck a match from the box

in his pocket, while she quickly shut the door after them. She broke into a laugh, more girlish than her usual note.

"Don't you feel as if you were Guy Fawkes? But we must n't wake mother."

She laid her letter upon the table, and he noticed that she had added a special-delivery stamp to insure Willoughby's receiving it early.

"You can send it just as well by messenger in the morning."

"I know. But I wanted to start it to-night."

"Lest your courage might give way, Honor?"

She smiled.

"No, I really was n't afraid of that. But having decided to send it, I could not sleep till the actual deed was done. Perhaps you don't see any difference between dropping the letter in the box and leaving it on my desk to be sent in the morning? That is because you are not a woman."

"Why are you breaking with Smith, if I may ask? A week ago you seemed delighted to marry him."

"I was. Of course I was n't in love with him. I knew that he was conceited and tire-

some and silly. But I thought I could stand it, considering how much he had to bestow. Now I find that I can't."

"You have suffered a change of heart."

"Father, we have been engaged seven days, and he has tried to please me. Yet already he exasperates me so that I can hardly be civil to him. Do you think that that is a good omen for the happiness of our future life?"

"The little things that exasperate you now, you will notice less as you become accustomed to them. And the young man has what you seemed to desire—great possessions."

She gave a low laugh.

"I wonder if I really do? That sounds absurd, because I told you, only the other day, that I did. I have always believed that I did. I have been brought up with the idea that I was to have a brilliant future. When I was about twelve years old, mother began gently putting the notion into my mind that I was quite different from other girls. At the convent girls and teachers took the same attitude —for me marriage was to be a career. I am not clever, you know, dad. I have never thought for myself. If everybody about me assumed that my mission in life was to make a great marriage, I supposed that it was. A

quick, original, rebellious girl would have thought it all out for herself, and perhaps disagreed with them, and perhaps agreed. Anyhow, she would have known what she herself wanted. But I never asked myself. I went right along on the rails."

She rose and began pacing the room, as he had seen her do once before.

"After I came home, the life I led never seemed to me very much worth while. But you and I are alike, dad,—we have n't a great deal of fight in us. We don't stick out for our rights. We give in, and feel injured." She faced him with laughing defiance—"Daddy, I 've got my war-paint on."

He answered gently and seriously:

"Honor, I don't suppose any father believes that there is a man living good enough for the little daughter whom he loves. Long after her mother knows that she is grown up and ought to be married, her father thinks that she is still a child, and the bare suggestion of her marriage seems shocking to him. I should like to keep you for my child forever. But of course it is better—it is, indeed, necessary—for you to marry. Willoughby Smith is no hero of romance, but I believe him a man to whom a father need n't be ashamed or afraid

to give his daughter. And he is, as your mother points out, an American prince."

"But if you don't happen to care for the life of an American princess, that is no advantage, is it? Dad, that man's one enjoyment is to entertain. In that respect he may very truly be called princely. There is something magnificent in his tireless, endless hospitality. He would have been perfectly happy as a Roman emperor, giving the whole populace *panem et circenses.* He would n't grudge the bread and he would sit up nights arranging the circuses. The rabble would have adored him. He is great—in his line. He would make a woman that shared his tastes altogether satisfied. But, daddy, I don't."

She paused only to breathe, then swept on:

"Dear, everybody assumes that steam-yachts, and great mansions, and private cars, and horses, and jewels, and opera-boxes are necessarily desirable. They are not desirable if you hate the life that they make for you. Willoughby loves crowds. I detest them. I am always afraid of people whom I don't know well, and it takes me years to know anybody well. I should never make a good hostess. I am not ready, I am not tactful, and I am not interested. I could, perhaps, force

myself to go through the motions properly and politely, but never gracefully, because I have no instinct for it. When you point out to me the advantages of the life I am giving up, you might as well be explaining the pleasures of hunting to somebody who is afraid of horses, or singing, 'A Life on the Ocean Wave' to a person who is seasick."

"I think you dread the pains of entertaining more than you need, Honor. You always dread a new thing."

"It is not a new thing. I 've been entertained and entertaining for five years."

"Then the question is whether the work to which Smith will subject you is any more galling than the work from which he will free you. Life is never a bed of roses, Honor. It is at best only a choice of evils, an endless compromise. Smith sets you free forever from money worries, from manual labor, from the sordid daily grind of ways and means."

"Is it sordid, dad? I won't be silly and say that I don't mind poverty. I should mind it very much. But I think the scale of life on which we live quite good enough for anybody. Mother and I design and cut and help to make the greater part of our clothes; and though we always sigh and say, 'Oh, to be able to buy in

Paris!' really there is no time in the year I enjoy so much as the quiet weeks, spring and fall, when we stay at home and sew. The only things that I learned well at the convent were sewing and cooking. I have n't a clever mind, but I do possess clever fingers. Don't you think that it 's a waste to put me in a sphere of life where I ought to have a mind, but shall never need the fingers?"

He laughed, but seemed about to protest, when she went on again:

"Father, you are anxious to save me from practical cares, because practicalities have always jarred on you all your days. You have longed to build heavenly mansions for heavenly people. If a client insists on a veranda across the front of a Tudor house, you have to give him one, because it is your livelihood, but you feel that you are betraying your art."

"I do feel it. It is for the freedom it gives one from such debasing necessities that I principally value money."

"Yes, you are an artist. But I should agree with the client that a comfortable place to sit in was far more important than his Tudor 'elevation.'"

"You are a Philistine!"

"That is what I am saying. You could n't

eat your dinner if you had planned every detail of its journey from the market to the table. Now, I could."

"Honor, the situation is more serious than you think."

"Wait, father. Hear me out! I appreciate that we are living beyond our means, wearing you out, body and soul. Mother is n't extravagant in the way she does things, —nobody could manage better,—but she is extravagant in the things she does. She thinks, poor soul! that she must give me my chance. I have thought it all out. If you let me stay with you, we shall live very differently. We shall give up our share in the opera-box. I shall go out once a week, instead of seven nights. At the very most, I should need only a third as many clothes; and if we entertain less and I have time to give to the house, we can send away two of the servants. I should like to keep the brougham for mother, but it will be no hardship to sell the victoria and one of the horses. This proposal does n't come gracefully from me, I admit; for I don't feel it a sacrifice, and it would be a great sacrifice for her. But I think mother might as well face things as they are, and recognize that she did n't marry an American prince."

"And that her daughter won't?"

"Dad, I admitted that I hate poverty. But if I had to choose between doing type-writing in the hall bedroom of a boarding-house and being Mrs. Willoughby Smith, I would take the hall bedroom and peace of mind."

"It may come to that, daughter. I have been having a talk to-night with my partner. The firm is in a very poor way."

"Why, father! I thought you were one of the most famous firms in New York."

"We are. But since John Clive died we have n't made much money. Richard and I are n't as sharp in our contracts as he was. We are n't as clever in drumming up customers. Perhaps, too, we have scruples about Tudor mansions with verandas. Anyway, business has fallen off. I could n't have lived as we have lived since you came home, except that I made fortunate investments in my fat years. Lately, the market has taken a disastrous turn. You knew that I had given an option on the house to Willoughby Smith."

"You told me. But I did n't guess it was necessity." She sat still a moment.

"And if I marry Willoughby Smith?"

"Don't misunderstand, dear child. I should never borrow a dollar from my son-in-

law. But if it were known that you were shortly to marry a very rich man, credit would be thrust upon me. Given time to turn around, I could save the situation. If the new owner does n't want the house, we could still live here, modestly. If the match is publicly broken off, we should have to leave it at once. We must go to a small flat or to the suburbs."

"Oh, poor mother!"

"It will be hard for you, too, Honor."

The girl paced with rapid, uneven steps about the room.

"I think it would almost kill mother."

Hammond rose, stopping his daughter in her march.

"Honor, you are not to think of your mother or of me. I had to tell you the prospect that lies before you. It would not be fair to let you decide in ignorance. I am only fifty; I expect to work out of my debts and yet be able to leave you and your mother a competence. There is my life insurance, anyhow. You will not, at the worst, be left to beggary —nor, at the best, to more than narrow means. I hope you may meet some one whom you will marry for love, but such happiness may never come. You will have all the anxieties and

disabilities of poverty for a time, certainly, and perhaps for all your life."

"For myself, I don't care—"

"Then, my darling, post your letter, and God bless you!"

She was clinging in his arms.

"Oh, dad, dad! I can't! Mother—"

"Honor, neither of your parents will sell their daughter."

His face wore the sternness which hardened its delicacy into nobility. Honor had never appreciated how handsome he was. Both her arms were round his neck.

"Darling father, if I give myself—"

"It is wrong, Honor. The young life should never be sacrificed to the old. We have had our life, to shape it as we saw fit. Now you shall have yours, to make of it what you can. I want you to understand well what you are doing. But if, at this crisis, with dark days before you, you can give up a mercenary marriage, I am very glad and proud."

She strove to speak, only to break into a fit of weeping. He sat down with her on his knee, as he had held her in her childhood. It was long before the passion of tears was past. But the outbreak was no sign of mental storm.

The moment she could control her voice she spoke quite calmly.

"You need n't be proud of me, daddy. It is no struggle. I regret nothing."

"And you are happy, my child?"

"Perfectly, dad. I cried because you are so splendid."

He drew her closer—if that were possible.

"Dear, when you told me of your engagement I could have denounced it, only that I honestly thought you capable of finding your life's happiness with Willoughby Smith. Shame to me, I did n't know my own daughter! I thought the child's loving heart was dead."

"Frozen up. But spring is here. The ice has been cracking lately, and you have melted the last crust to-night."

He kissed her, and she rose to pick up her cloak and her letter, turning to him a radiant face.

"We 'll post it now, daddy." A cloud passed over her face. "Oh, I dread telling mother!"

"You need n't. I don't intend you to tell your mother."

She rubbed her cheek against his shoulder.

"You *are* a brick!"

He laughed.

"I am not sparing you, my dear, but her." He lifted her chin till she met his eyes, smiling but determined. "Honor, you and your mother have different ideals. You are not just to her. In the crash of her hopes she will find it hard to be just to you. I shall explain to her, to-morrow, how you and I feel, and that we shall all be wise to say no more about it. Whatever she may say to you, I expect you to remember that you have disappointed her dearest ambition, and to be most patient and devoted and kind."

"You angel, I shall make the effort of my life to be good."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE TRUTH ABOUT TOLNA

THE Burnhams and the Fannings now shared the Burnham opera-box. The music-mad Margery insisted on an uninterrupted right of possession, and Jessie, most of whose set were satisfied with the exhibition of this glory once or twice a week, was delighted to be more expensive than they. She cheerfully paid her money for the pleasure of seeing her name inscribed on the program as owner of Box —— for all performances. But except on Friday and on Monday evenings —the two occasions which she considered "smart"—she seldom troubled herself to sit in it. Knowing her engagements, the Fannings, coming to their familiar places on Monday, were surprised to discover their unmusical kinsfolk already in occupation.

"What, you here, Jessie, on your dinner-dance night!" Margery cried; while her mo-

ther added, "And before the overture, too!"

"Well, it 's Tolna—or, more likely, it is n't Tolna—in the new opera, you see. And they 're going to have a tremendous house. Just see how it is filling up in the gallery already! And down-stairs, too. However, I did n't come for love of Tolna's *beaux yeux*. The dinner-dance affair fell through, and we had n't a thing to do. Besides, I thought there might be ructions to-night."

As Mrs. Fanning pounced on her brother for his advice about stocks,—a subject from which New Yorkers can no more keep away than could Mr. Dick from King Charles's head,—Jessie leaned confidentially to her niece.

"Madge, was n't that a lovely roast that Harry Mayne wrote yesterday?"

Margery, for all her gala dress, was in no gala mood. The last twenty-four hours had been the most miserable of her life. No anticipation of pleasure in the music, but sheer restlessness, had driven her from home,—touched, perhaps, by some vague hope that she might encounter Denys Alden, and say—she knew not what.

She was spared the necessity of an answer by the arrival in the next box of Hyacinth

Lawrence, marvelously attired in a light-green gown, made without ruffle, tuck, or flounce, and apparently without seams, as if it were molded on her long, sinuous figure—one unbroken line from the shoulder to the end of the long train. With this creation, Miss Lawrence wore jade bracelets and a chaplet of ivy leaves.

"There 's Nell with the Minthorns," Jessie noted,—to call over the rail: "Nellie, how exactly like a caterpillar you do look! And I see you 've got your dinner with you, too."

Quite undisturbed, Hyacinth announced:

"You are going to have mother's convention, Jessie."

"What larks! How did you work it?"

"I told mother that if it met at my house, I should ask the Swami Abvikananda to speak. I said that it was only common fairness to hear both sides."

"Now, I wonder whether I could n't get some 'First Reader' to make a few remarks to 'em," ruminated Mrs. Nortie, when Margery suddenly interrupted:

"Jessie, I beg your pardon; I entirely forgot that I had asked her, and of course I never dreamed of seeing you here. But the fact is, Honor Hammond is coming."

"Good work!" Jessie laughed. "I suppose your tea-party came off? I 'll poison her mind against Willie. No, that won't do. She 'll set it down to jealousy—which it is. All the same, that young person must n't expect— Speak of angels!"

As the door creaked the young women, turning to welcome Miss Hammond, were confronted by the hesitant form and blushing countenance of Mr. Willoughby Smith.

"She is n't here yet—but come in," bade Mrs. Nortie, blandly. "You 're the right man in the right place. You have n't given me a chance yet to congratulate you, and I most particularly want to do it. Oh, you 'll see!"

Before this somewhat ominous welcome, Mr. Smith's embarrassment visibly increased. Desperately he found his tongue.

"I came to see *you,* Mrs. Burnham. I wanted to tell you that—that—my engagement is at an end."

This was one of the few occasions in her life when words deserted Mrs. Norton Burnham. While she sat staring at her visitor, it was Margery who held out the helping hand.

"When two persons find out that they are not altogether adapted to each other, they are

so wise to acknowledge it in time. Are n't they, Mr. Smith?"

"That 's what I thought, Miss Fanning. I found that my interests were not being sympathized with, or my wishes being respected, as I felt they ought to be, and so I—er—in fact—"

"In fact, you were manly enough and honest enough to admit that you had made a mistake," Margery prompted.

"Well, I—er—intimated to Miss Hammond that I feared we were n't as congenial as we might be. I—er—some fellows might have hated to do that, but I felt that she 'd thank me in the end."

"No doubt she will thank you in the beginning." Mrs. Burnham had found her tongue. "We expect her here every moment."

Mr. Smith began to back out of the box.

"I can't stay, Mrs. Burnham. I 've an appointment. I came to ask you if you would n't go on with the Sing Sing dinner? You never do really fail a fellow, and of course I know I could n't bring it off without you."

Mrs. Burnham hesitated a bare moment. It would be a pleasure, certainly, to snub the fool,—but, on the whole, she thought, a more lasting pleasure to exhibit him once more

chained to her chariot-wheels. Besides, she loved the extravaganza of the dinner for its own sake.

"Yes, if you 'll give me *carte blanche* with the invitations," she decided. "And we 'll go and consult Pinky Fraser this minute. I did n't think they 'd come to-night, but there they all are."

As her cavalier held the door open for her, she turned her head to launch at Margery one large, triumphant wink.

So soon on the heels of their departure did Miss Hammond arrive, that Margery thought it best to ask:

"Did you meet my young aunt and Mr. Smith?"

Honor laughed. She had never looked so radiantly lovely, so actually happy, as to-night.

"Yes; is n't it funny? Did he reluctantly confess that he had thrown me over? Poor fellow! This morning he wasted an hour begging me to reconsider. But by to-morrow he will be glad of his escape. He would n't have admitted it, but I could see that he was n't at ease in my company. After the first day or two, he felt the yoke. Now he will straighten

up his shoulders and breathe the breath of freedom."

Margery smiled.

"He did hint that it was he who had found the need of it."

Honor laughed again.

"I don't mind that. Except to you, I don't intend to contradict it. I owe him that small compensation. I treated him badly enough in accepting him; and I have n't, I am ashamed to say, shown him common civility since. It will please him to think that everybody will credit his version of the story. Besides, I am not so magnanimous as I sound. For of course nobody who knows me would ever believe that I had jilted all those millions. Why should they?"

"We shall believe it. And so will everybody, if—"

The overture to "I Pagliacci" was wasted on the two girls, as Honor leaned over to clutch Margery's wrist, saying in a voice vibrantly earnest, strangely unlike the familiar monotony of its tones:

"I thought, from our coming in together, that you might think—and especially when we did not wait for you—but we met quite acci-

dentally at your corner. So when he said that you had said you were at home at five o'clock, I did n't like to make a point of it."

Margery looked blank. In the preoccupation of her own emotions, this lucid explanation failed, for the instant, to attach itself to Tolna.

"We used to play together when we were children," Honor went on. "He came to the house on Thursday, and I was very glad to see him again—very. But my change of mind had absolutely nothing to do with him. And after breaking faith with Willoughby, I should certainly never marry another man. As for Morry Fordham, he is just my good friend, as he used to be when I was ten years old." Honor laughed. "To be frank, I have never known a less sentimental person—except myself."

Margery read this speech as any woman would, but she answered very gravely and sympathetically:

"Of course, dear. I invited you because I thought he might look in. It was so nice and frank of him to tell me that you were old friends. Nobody except me knows about that interrupted tea-party. It is I who should

explain my desertion of you. I was detained by unexpected complications."

Honor's grip on her friend's wrist relaxed somewhat. Reassured of Margery's understanding, she seemed about to offer further confidences, when an usher entered the box with a scrap of paper for Miss Fanning.

May I see you a moment, outside the door?

M. F.

Glancing quietly at Honor, who had turned her face to the stage, she rose softly and slipped through the little cloak-room to the lobby, closing both doors behind her.

Theirs was the last box but one on the tier, this very end of the promenade being concealed by the curve of the horseshoe from the throngs nearer the stairs. As the boxes on either side were already filled, Maurice's moment seemed likely to be uninterrupted.

"Are n't you singing, after all?" the girl cried.

"Not in this nightmare." Maurice's brightness seemed under eclipse. "Miss Fanning, Denys is n't here to-night. Things must be pretty bad with him if he won't come to hear

me do *Roland.* He has worked over me, these two years, with prayers and tears, to get me 'inside' the part, and now—he can't look at it! I heard from that great brute, Hirt, just now, that the poor chap is half out of his mind with concern over me—though I don't know why he should be, except that he 's Denys. Hirt grinned like a Chessy cat when he told me. But I can't stand keeping old Denys on the rack any longer. I shall go straight home after the services. And what I came to ask you is whether I may n't give him some hint of the truth? In my own mind, I have n't a doubt that it 's you, and not I, that he 's wasting in despair over. Of course I *can't* explain anything without your leave. But don't you think, really, that the joke has gone far enough?"

"It has gone a great deal too far," she assented, almost sobbing, as she poured forth the tale of her undoing. "Oh, Mr. Fordham, I never meant to hurt him so. I did n't know what I was doing. Oh, I have grown years older since yesterday. You were perfectly right when you said it was my contemptible vanity that made me so hard on him. You see, girls take it for granted that they have all the

pride and delicacy and sensitiveness—I never suspected that a man could suffer so."

"Yes," agreed Maurice, serenely. "I ought to have warned you that the duffer can't stand being made game of."

"It was n't that," the girl cried indignantly, her good-will toward her companion making a sudden recoil. She had to remind herself of his deserts, his supreme merit of being Denys's friend, before she could forgive him this travesty of the situation. It was plain to her how, despite excellent qualities, he must jar on the finer nature of Denys! "It was n't that at all," she repeated, with hot reproof. "I lacerated his most sacred feelings, tortured them, flayed them! I deserved his contempt—but it hurts none the less."

"Well, perhaps something can be done yet. As I see the case, Miss Fanning, Denys has got to know why you did what you did."

Her blush was charming.

"I want him to know, Mr. Fordham."

"Then don't give up the ship, Miss Fanning. I can see it coming into port, yet, all flags flying." His confident, good-comrade's smile was so heartening that her own smile, somewhat watery, answered it.

In a day-dream she was turning away, when she suddenly remembered what tidings she had in store for him.

"Oh, how selfish I am! I have n't thanked you, which you won't mind, nor given you my great news, which you will. She has broken her engagement!"

"Not Honor?"

"Yes. She has just told me. She is there, in our box."

His hand was on the door-knob when she laid hers on it.

"Wait! You have been helping me. Now I can help you. Mr. Fordham, she says that her throwing over Willie Smith had nothing whatever to do with you."

"I 'm not conceited enough to suppose that it had."

"No, of course not. But—I suppose you *do* mean to ask her to marry you, Mr. Fordham?"

"I will not conceal from you, Miss Fanning, that such is my immediate intention."

"Well, don't you see that if you ask her immediately she will say no? She could n't let everybody think that she jilted another man for you."

"Did she tell you—"

"No, of course not. But I can see. Some girls would be glad to be on with the new love the moment they were off with the old, if it were only to prevent people's believing Mr. Smith's tale that he broke the engagement. But Honor is different. She is so proud that she does n't care what people think, but only what she does."

"Do you mean that I 'd better wait overnight?"

"I should wait a few months."

For a moment he stood pondering, his hand still on the door-knob. Then he looked at Margery with his boyish smile.

"I 'm awfully obliged to you, Miss Fanning. I don't doubt I shall rue the hour when I rejected your advice. But I find I *must* see her."

"Oh, I wash my hands of you!" Margery cried, immediately belying her own words. "But of course you can't speak to her in the box, with mother and Uncle Norton there, and all the Minthorns staring. I 'll send her to you."

On her way, Miss Fanning reflected: "If I send her out by a trick she will be angry. But if I tell her the truth she won't go." Choosing the lesser risk, she said:

"Dear, there 's a man, with a message for you, waiting just outside."

"From mother, no doubt. She and dad are down-stairs," Honor answered placidly as she stole out into the promenade.

She started back with a cry:

"Oh, Bim! You!"

"Yes, dear. Let me speak to you a moment. I have just learned that I may speak."

She shrank back against the door, making no answer.

"Honor, I have never cared for any girl except you. I shall never forgive myself because I let you go and get engaged to Willoughby Smith before I ever played a stroke in the game. Well, I could n't say anything to that. He was a millionaire and a very decent fellow. It was all right. But since by God's grace that engagement is broken off, I can come to you and say that I love you with my whole heart and soul and expect to remain yours to command while the breath of life is in me."

"Oh, Bim!" she cried. "Oh, Bim!"

"Oh, Honor!"

"But, Bim, I did n't do it with any reference to you. I did it because I saw the horror of marrying without love. Perhaps you

helped me to see it—in fact, I know you did—but I should have set Mr. Smith free if you had told me that you loved some one else, or that you were going away and would never see me again. Do you believe me?"

"Of course I do."

"Bim, it has meant the opening of a new world for me. There 's father. Ever since I came back from the convent he seemed to have the same experience that you were afraid of—he could n't find his little girl. He stood aloof and watched mother and me as if he did n't belong to us. But when I told him that I was going to give up my great match—" her eyes filled with sudden tears. "Well, of all the angels!

"He offered to tell mother—insisted on it. Of course it was an awful blow to mother's ambitions for me. But she has been a perfect dear about it—I never knew mother before, any more than I did dad. They both are lovely to me. And dad is so sorry for mother, and she is so glad of his sympathy, that they are actually having a silver honeymoon. We have taken a house in the country for a year, and we are going to live quietly and get acquainted.

"And so, don't you see, Morry, that now,

when I want to show dad how I appreciate him, and want to make mother love me so much that she will be glad every hour that I did n't leave her—don't you see that now I can't turn my back on them and marry you?"

"Better wait till you 're asked, miss."

"Oh! Excuse me! I understood that you had asked me."

"Not at all. All I require of you at present is to put my name on the waiting-list, so that at any future day, when you feel that your romantic parents might like to have their honeymoon by themselves, you will consider my qualifications along with my competitors'."

"Morry, you are laughing at me, but you do understand?"

"I understand that I want to do anything on earth that you want me to, because I know it is right."

She gave him a long look from the depths of her wonderful eyes.

"Bim, you are simply the most satisfactory person that ever lived."

"Honor, you must n't say such things to me when we 're not engaged."

Monsieur Tolna mistook in supposing that his inseparable shadow was not in the Opera-

House. But if poor Denys could no more keep away than the moth can keep away from the candle, he expected little more pleasure than the moth finds in the flame. Though now he was beyond minding the publication of Maurice's disappearance, the fact held for him a new bitterness. For Maurice had been right, and he wrong. He had driven the boy from his home, from his career, from his honor, by a fantastic fraud.

Automatically, his steps turned toward the stage entrance, when he pulled himself up with sad self-scorn. He had killed his goose with the golden eggs, deliberately thrown away his only claim to enter that paradise 'behind the scenes.' Turning back into Broadway, he passed the big posters still proclaiming the appearance of Maurus Tolna as *Roland* in the first American production of Tonti's most successful opera, "L'Enchanteresse." He wondered dully whom Hirt had put into the part—Grigni or Erdmann. It hardly mattered; either would murder it.

As he crossed the foyer with the admission ticket which was all that the box-office could furnish, he felt a hand on his shoulder. Looking up into Hirt's face, he instantly saw that he had been stopped for a purpose.

"You have news?" he cried, only to be

dashed from his hope by the answer, "I know no more than I did yesterday." He was turning away, when he found himself pushed along into Hirt's private office.

"Just come in here, will you? I want to speak to you. The opera business must go on, you see, even in the tragic absence of Tolna," Hirt said, with an odd smile. "Mr. Alden, I am dissatisfied with Obermuller and I intend to install a new stage-manager before we start on the road. How would you like the job?"

Finding his candidate too surprised to reply, the impresario explained further.

"You and I have had our little frictions, Mr. Alden. Well, on my side, at least, they were not personal. My quarrel was with the office you hold—in my opinion (I speak plainly, as I have always spoken), a superfluous and mischievous one. Your presence as Monsieur Tolna's interpreter annoys me. I prefer to deal directly with my people. And it has made me all sorts of trouble with my company, every one of whom wants his or her particular friend behind the scenes if Tolna is to have his. As Tolna's manager, you are an exasperation. As my manager, I make no doubt you would be a tower of strength. I

know the training a man gets who has been with Letsky in Vienna. I have seen a hundred times that you know your business better than anybody it has ever been my good fortune to meet. Will you come to me?"

"Is n't your motive a good deal like a woman's when she marries a man to get rid of him?" Denys attempted to take the situation in a light and offhand manner. But before he knew how he got there, he was on his feet shaking the manager's hand in both of his. "Herr Hirt, you have turned into reality the dream of my life."

He had been late in starting for the Opera-House. Now, as he entered the auditorium, the orchestra was already beginning the exquisite, haunting overture of "L'Enchanteresse." Almost against his will, his spirits rose. He knew that he ought not to enjoy one moment till he could right the wrong he had done his friend, yet he could not but rejoice in the compliment paid him, in the opportunity before him of correcting old abuses, of introducing new devices, of inventing novel interpretations, of breathing the breath of life into the dry bones of dead conventions—in short, of riding his hobbies with a free rein,

till the American operatic stage should become the model for the Old World. As he took his place at the back of the three solid rows of enthusiasts standing behind the orchestra chairs, the atmosphere of the theater intoxicated him, as always. He began to admit the possibility that Maurice might yet be traced, and that all might be well.

Then he groaned aloud, horrified that for a moment he had forgotten his broken heart.

A lady near turned her head; then, apparently assured that what sounded like agony was only musical appreciation, continued a low-voiced conversation with her escort.

"But *do* you suppose there 's any truth in the 'Palladium' story?"

"Did n't you see Hirt's denial in the 'Calliope' this morning?"

"Monsieur Tolna's own denial would have been more convincing."

"My dear girl, they did n't want to convince you. They wanted you and all the rest of us to crowd in here to-night, all a-twitter to find out whether he is going to sing."

"Just as I *did!* Harry, how cynical of you."

Now the curtain was rising on the lovely scene of the enchanted lake, and the whispers

in the audience hushed to absolute silence. *Morgan le Fay* sang and frolicked with her nymphs; old *Merlin* wove his dark spells; *King Arthur's* knights came by, a-hunting. And now should young *Sir Roland,* alone and on foot, steal back to the haunts that old tales say shelter the fairy *Morgan.*

Denys could not see the stage. He must wait till the song should tell him who was essaying *Roland.* Before the first notes sounded came such a storm of welcome as even the hero-worshiping Metropolitan audience does not give every day. Denys quivered from head to foot. Could Grigni—Erdmann—inspire this?"

And now *Roland,* half timidly at first, gaining confidence as he goes on, begins to plead with the powerful fay for the love-potion. Either Denys was mad, or it was Tolna's voice. There was something strange about it, a difference, a new timbre, a capacity for emotion unknown to him, but in all the world there was no such other voice.

Yet he might be—he probably was—mad. He touched the lady in front of him on his left.

"Is it Tolna?"

"Yes—hush!" she answered, intent on the last notes of the aria.

Denys turned to the person on his right, a lad of fourteen or fifteen, who had been listening with all his soul. Surely the boy would not deceive him.

"Who was it singing?" he asked.

The boy's look withered him. "Do you suppose there 's anybody on earth that can sing that way but Tolna?"

As Monsieur Tolna went to his dressing-room after the fourteenth curtain-call, he was half strangled by Denys's arm about his neck.

"Maurice, it 's the success of your life!"

"Glad you think so, Denny. More glad you 're here. I thought you were n't."

"Maurice, I owe you the humblest apology. I was all in the wrong in that matter—"

"Oh, enough said. You thought you were right, Denny. Are you going to take that stage-managership? Good enough! We 'll be a happy family once more, for I 've signed with Hirt for three years."

"You have! When you declared you were going to leave the stage?"

Maurice laughed.

"Oh, those were my salad days, when I was

green in judgment. They are over now. I can't afford to be romantic and go knight-erranting round in brokers' offices. I might not succeed as a broker's clerk, and I can't take risks. I 've got to bone down to the commonplace, humdrum trade of opera-singing and make money for my wife."

"So that 's it?"

"That 's it, Denny."

"What a type of America! You won't be an artist for Art's sake, but you will be one to make money for your wife!"

"Portrait of a famous singer, life-size," serenely acquiesced Maurice, going on with his toilet.

"Why did n't you tell me, boy, that you cared for somebody? Of course I should at once have stopped urging my plea."

The singer laughed into his mirror. "Oh, no, you would n't, Denys. You 'd have told me that I deceived myself; that I really loved Miss Fanning."

Denys, wincing, hastened to turn the subject.

"If we could have guessed that you were coming back—"

"You knew. I said so in my note."

"You only said that you were going away."

"Why, Denny! surely I said 'till Monday'? No? Well, I wrote in a great hurry, to get out of your reach. But anyhow François knew—and Hirt. Hirt and I arranged it together."

"And Hirt!" Denys echoed, suddenly sinking down on a trunk. Maurice turned around from the restoration of an eyebrow.

"Why, you must have known that if I skipped Saturday's performance, it was by arrangement with Hirt. You must have known I would n't break a date, old chap?"

There was nothing to say to this, and Denys attempted nothing. He sat still, watching the tenor's deft movements in a long silence. After his own orgy of emotions, it was stupefying to find the object of them entirely tranquil, matter of fact, matter of course, as if nothing had happened. It was no less stupefying to realize that, except in his own imagination, nothing *had* happened.

At last Denys found tongue.

"Of all blind, fatuous, determined, and thoroughgoing fools, I seem to have been the most blind, fatuous, determined, and thoroughgoing."

"You mean your conduct toward Miss Fanning? Don't put it in the past tense, Denny."

Denys rose, looking rather white.

"That is the one name, Maurice, which henceforth I can never hear, even from you."

"There you go off at half-cock again! Look here, Denys; you made me listen for two days to talk of Miss Fanning. Now do you listen for two minutes."

THE curtain was just rising on the second act of "L'Enchanteresse" when Denys Alden, hot-footed, breathless, his hair over his eyes, shot into the Burnhams' box, precisely as on that night, ten days before, when Margery first saw Tolna. Mrs. Burnham was still visiting the Frasers; Mr. Burnham was asleep in his corner; Mrs. Fanning whispered across the rail to Mrs. Minthorn, while Honor Hammond leaned over the front of the box, as if she longed for wings to fly where her spirit already was. Only Margery heard the door open, and, turning, saw Denys in the tiny anteroom.

Before she knew that she had thought of moving, she stood at his side among the dangling cloaks.

"Margery, can you forgive me?"

"Denys, can *you* forgive *me?*"

The end of the opera might have found

them still there in each other's arms, had not the exuberant return of Jessie Burnham, Victrix, driven them apart.

"Hello, Mr. Alden!" exclaimed the voluble lady. "So the Prodigal returned, did he? I can't see if he has the gold ring on his finger and the chain round his neck. But of course you 'd have the stage properties all right. How did you enjoy that little yarn in the 'Palladium'? Well, I 'm ready to call our account square, now, if you are. Shake!—no; wait a minute. Why did n't you acknowledge my floral tribute? You like symbolism, I 've heard you say. But you have n't even answered the message on the card. I can tell you it took me some time to think up one equal to the occasion."

"Mrs. Burnham," faltered Denys, "I—I did not even read it. I—I was very busy. Pray pardon my negligence. You have doubled your kindness by speaking of it."

"Oh, have I," smiled the lady, slipping into her corner.

Moving past her, Margery and Denys accepted the decorous proximity of two front chairs. He was holding her hand under cover of her scarf. For a time neither of them was capable of hearing a bar of the music. But at

length, when *Roland,* escaping the spell of the treacherous *Morgan,* pours out to *Violante* all his love and longing, the wonderful notes would no longer be denied. Listening awhile in ever-growing wonder, Denys at last whispered:

"Margery, does happiness make one not only see, but hear, rose-color? Do I dream, or is this boy singing as he never sang before? Is n't he, after all, a mere mechanism without a soul? An hour ago I was sure that I was mad. But I can trust your sanity. Margery, *does* he sing with the charm and sensibility and exaltation and passion which I have gone about pretending that he had?"

Without a word, with the smallest movement of her head, Margery looked toward Honor.

For a moment his glance dwelt on the girl's rapt face; then followed her gaze to the face of the singer turned upward toward her, seeing only her.

Smiling, he whispered:

"It seems, then, that the more I romanced and rhapsodized about his fire, his poetry, his 'soul,' the more exactly I was telling the truth about Tolna."

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